

# State of our beaches

Beachwatch report



2025

# Single use plastics found on 97% of beaches surveyed in 2025

More than **14,000 volunteers** completed over **1,100 litter surveys**, allowing us to identify common litter items, sources and trends, and use this evidence to push for change.

Across the UK and Channel Islands, volunteers removed over **600,000 litter items** from our beaches, weighing more than **11,400kg!** Overall, we saw a **15% decrease in litter** compared to 2024 – potentially as a result of the single-use plastic bans introduced across the UK in the past few years.

This litter data fed into **multiple consultation responses** across the UK, including the UK Marine Strategy, Northern Ireland Plastic Pollution Plan, Wales Deposit Return Scheme and Scotland's Circular Economy Strategy. Beachwatch data was also used in key policy and parliamentary briefings on marine litter issues, with parliamentarians in Holyrood, Westminster and the Senedd using it as evidence and illustrating the need to act.

**Why not send a copy of this report to your local politician and ask them what action they're currently taking to tackle litter pollution?**



For a breakdown of our litter data and what this tells us about the state of our beaches, scan the QR code here: [actmcs.org/beachwatch25-rp](https://actmcs.org/beachwatch25-rp)



In 2025...

**14,507 volunteers** got involved in beach cleans.

**Volunteers cleared 603,963 litter items** from the coast.

**88 miles** of beach were cleaned across the UK and Channel Islands.

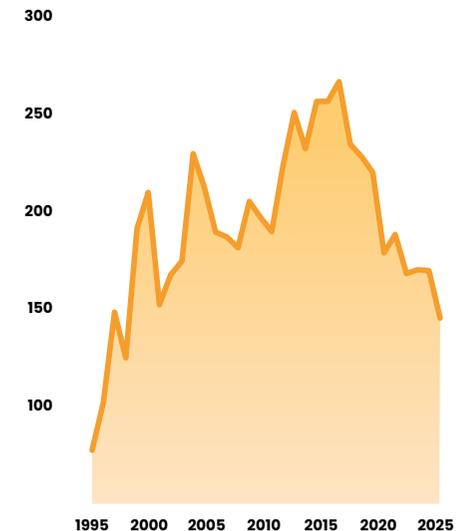
**11.4 tonnes** of litter were removed from our beaches, equal to **10 average great white sharks**

**Volunteers spent 24,938 hours** cleaning and recording litter on beaches – that's more than **1,000 days of 24/7 cleaning**



## Promising results as litter levels fall

Our UK beach clean surveys show encouraging progress: **average litter levels dropped by 15%** between 2024 and 2025, including an **18% fall in single-use plastics**. With several single-use items banned throughout the UK by 2023, we're hopeful these results reflect the positive impact of those measures.



Average number of litter items found per 100m of beach in the UK and Channel Islands between 1994 and 2025.

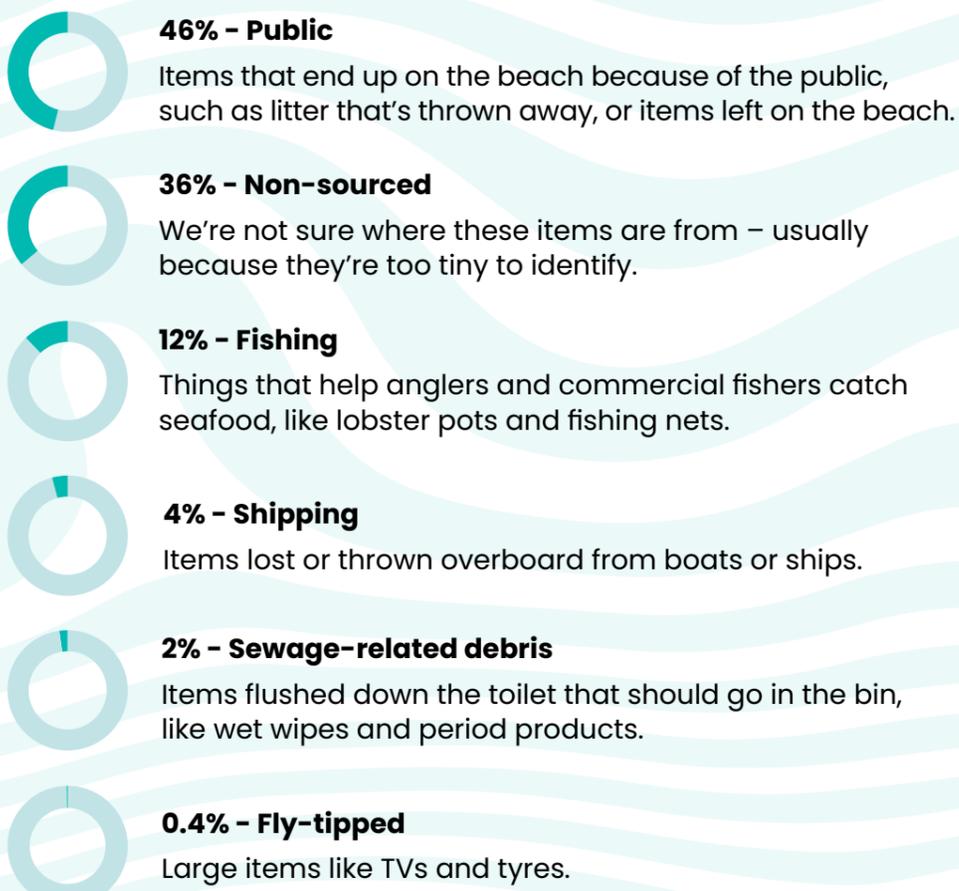
# The UK and Channel Islands' 2025 beach litter story

## What did we find?

On average, **141** litter items were found per 100m on UK and Channel Island beaches, a decrease of **↓ 15%** from 2024.



## Litter sources

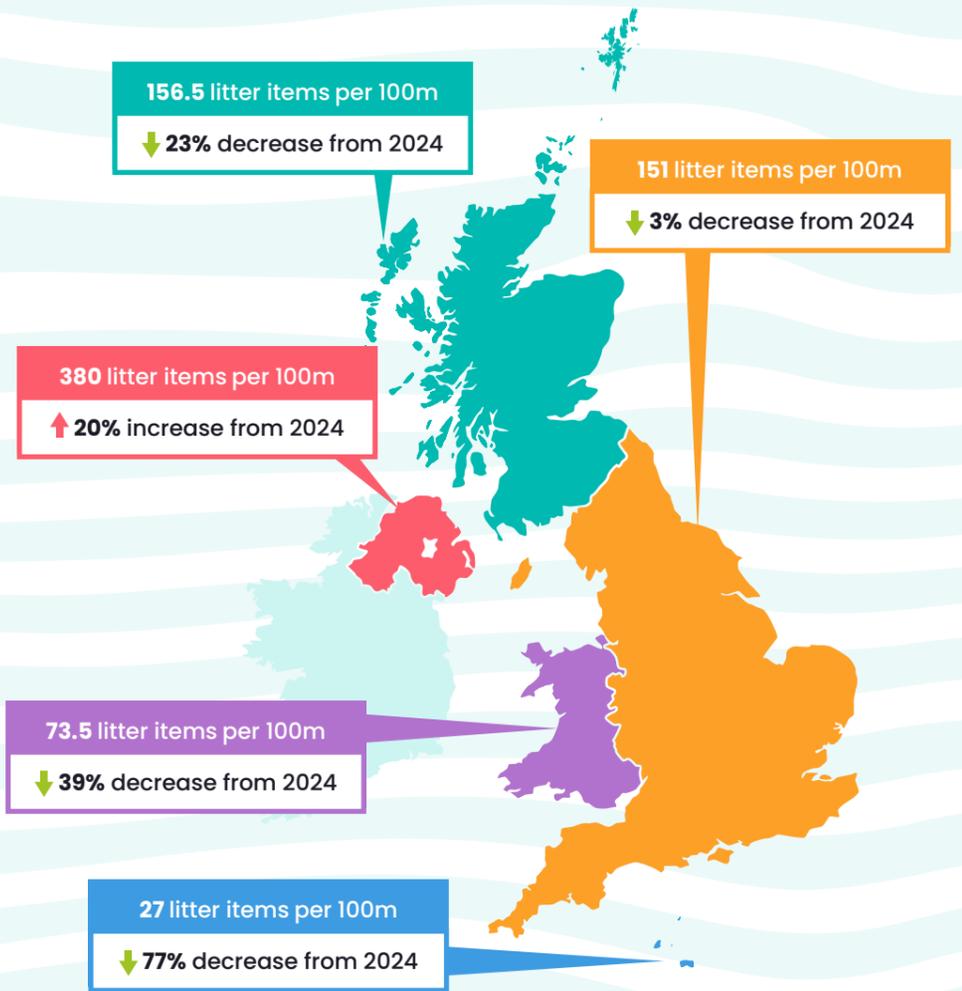


## Source to Sea Litter Quest

Despite living inland, **1,465** of our volunteers did something amazing for our ocean by taking part in our Source to Sea Litter Quest.



- 41,351** items were removed from our towns, parks and rivers.
- Single-use plastics made up **four of the top five** items.



## Policy works

Thanks to our amazing volunteers recording the litter they find during their beach cleans, we can track changes in types and amounts of marine litter over time – particularly after policies and bans are introduced. This allows us to evidence the success and importance of laws and policies to prevent litter pollution, so we can push for more changes.

We've already seen the positive impact of carrier bag charges – with 80% fewer plastic bags found on our beaches as a result. We are now beginning to see a downward trend in certain single-use plastic items which have been banned, such as plastic cutlery and straws, cotton bud sticks and polystyrene cups; but with other items like food containers on the rise, it's clear more action is needed.

**158,238** single-use plastic items found on 97% of beaches surveyed in 2025

As well as bans, we need to reduce our reliance on single-use products and shift to a circular economy that's centred on reuse and refilling.

## What is a Circular Economy?

Our economy is mostly a 'make, use, then throw away' model, which is why we see so much litter. In a circular one, however, the things we use are designed to be reused, refilled, repaired or repurposed – reducing pollution and our burden on the planet.

Plastic packaging was the top item found, making up **28%** of litter items recorded.

Plastic bottles were recorded on **91.5%** of cleans.

2,080 glass bottles were found across **65.6%** of cleans.



Join us today and together we can do even more to help fight pollution – [www.mcsuk.org/join](http://www.mcsuk.org/join)



# Thank you to everyone who took part in 2025. Here's how to get involved in 2026

## Join or organise a beach clean

Our **beach cleans** and **litter surveys** run all year round, and they're a fantastic way to protect our seas while enjoying the great outdoors. Check if there's an event near you – if not, why not organise your own? We'll give you all the resources and training you need to get started.

## Can't get to the coast? You can still help!

Take part in our **Source to Sea Litter Quest** and stop pollution before it reaches the ocean. By clearing and recording litter inland, you'll help prevent waste entering waterways and contribute to a bigger picture of UK litter.

## Looking for a team building or volunteering day?

Join our experts for a beach clean and give your team a day to remember! It's fun, rewarding, and makes a real difference for the environment.

Find out more at [mcsuk.org/beach-cleans](https://mcsuk.org/beach-cleans)

## Become a member of the Marine Conservation Society

Your ongoing support powers hands-on conservation work across the UK. From just £5 a month, you'll join a passionate community of ocean advocates.

Join us at [mcsuk.org/join](https://mcsuk.org/join)



Registered with



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



Registered charity in England and Wales 1004005 and in Scotland SC037480.

Front cover: Jack Tate



[mcsuk.org](https://mcsuk.org)

[mcs\\_uk](https://www.instagram.com/mcs_uk)

[mcsuk](https://www.facebook.com/mcsuk)

[mcsuk](https://twitter.com/mcsuk)

[mcsuk](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mcsuk)