

**PRESS RELEASE, EMARGOED UNTIL 00:01, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

## **Regional data shows spread of Scottish sewage scandal**

The [Marine Conservation Society](#), the UK's leading ocean charity, found that only 3.4% of storm overflows are monitored and reported on in Scotland compared to 96% in Wales and 91% in England. In 2022, the Marine Conservation Society recorded over 35,000 pieces of sewage-related litter on Scottish beaches.

The greatest number of sewage-related items found on the charity's beach cleans in 2022 were in the Lothian parliamentary region, with 19,590 sewage related litter items collected and recorded across the year. The most sewage-related items found in a 100 metre stretch were in Central Scotland, with an average of 358 per 100 metres. The charity's volunteers in the Mid Scotland and Fife region found an average of 36 sewage-related items in 2022.

Research by the Marine Conservation Society shows that time and again, sewage is poured into our ocean, even near protected areas and bathing waters, interfering with the ocean's delicate balance and polluting our shores.

Monitoring and reporting of storm overflows is crucial in providing data to inform action to prevent sewage discharges, and the resulting litter that pollutes beaches.

The Lothian region has the fewest storm overflows monitored with only 4 (1.4%) of 296. Most monitoring of storm overflows is in Central Scotland, but still only 29 (7%) of the region's 422 are monitored.

### **Catherine Gemmell, Scotland Conservation Officer at the Marine**

**Conservation Society**, said, "Monitoring of storm overflows is crucial to improving the sewage situation in Scotland. Without data on the problem, the Scottish Government cannot hold those responsible accountable, and we cannot see where the worst affected areas are.

"For the sake of wildlife, people and planet, we need investment in monitoring. Given how many sewage-related items our volunteers across Scotland find on our beaches, we know the situation is bad, but we need to understand the full extent of the issue, so it can be fixed."

In Central Scotland last year, sewage was discharged for over 26,000 hours, according to data from just the 7% of storm overflows that are monitored and reported on. Untreated sewage poses risks for public health and the environment, containing bacteria and viruses which, if exposed, can cause illness in people using the water.

Persistent chemicals, such as Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), are used widely across many consumer products, including non-stick cookware, cosmetics and stainproof clothing, meaning these chemicals have a direct route into sewage. These 'forever chemicals' can make marine wildlife more vulnerable to infectious diseases and other stressors such as climate change. They have been linked to numerous health impacts in marine life including suppressed immune systems, hormonal imbalance and neurological impacts in marine mammals as well as thyroid impacts in sea birds.

Sewage also contains microplastics which are ingested by marine life at every stage of the food chain and have been found in the stomachs of seabirds, turtles, cetaceans, plankton and fish, including seafood for human consumption. A study found 63% of shrimp in the North Sea contained synthetic fibres. Ingestion of plastics by marine organisms can negatively impact their feeding behaviour, growth, development, reproduction and lifespan.

Sewage contributes to ocean 'dead zones', algal blooms, and areas where oxygen concentrations are reduced. Delicate species and habitats, such as fish or seagrass, struggle in oxygen-poor conditions and in areas where light is reduced by excess plankton resulting from increased nutrient loading.

Despite Scottish Water publishing its *Improving Urban Waters Routemap* in December 2021, with [an annual update](#) in 2022 outlining actions being taken to reduce pollution from storm overflows, just 3% across Scotland have been identified as high priority discharges for improvement by 2027.

The Marine Conservation Society is demanding that the Scottish Government reduces the harmful impacts of storm overflow discharges by:

- **Ensuring that all storm overflows are monitored and reported on by 2026**, to include frequency, duration, and ecological impact.
- **Setting progressive reduction targets for sewage spills** and ensuring that storm overflows only operate during heavy rainfall.

- **Tackling Sewage Related Litter in the environment** by screening storm overflows, supporting the use of reusable sanitary products, and the phasing out of single-use plastic sanitary products.

The Marine Conservation Society is asking Scotland's residents to email their Member of the Scottish Parliament to raise awareness of these issues. You can find out more at [www.mcsuk.org/what-you-can-do/campaigns/scotlands-sewage-scandal](http://www.mcsuk.org/what-you-can-do/campaigns/scotlands-sewage-scandal)

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## Press Contact

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## Notes to editors

The [Marine Conservation Society](#) is the UK's leading ocean charity, fighting for cleaner, better-protected, healthier seas. The charity works to highlight the importance of our ocean, and the life within it, through working with government, industry and education, to take action to restore and protect the marine environment.

See the Marine Conservation Society's [Scotland CSO briefing](#) and [UK CSO policy](#) for full storm overflow asks.

## Sewage-related litter statistics by Scottish Parliamentary Region from Marine Conservation Society 2022 data

	Surveys	Total sewage-related items	Average per 100 metres	Percent of average (%)	Presence
<b>Central Scotland</b>	15	5971	358	72.8	100.0
<b>Highlands and Islands</b>	121	499	0	0.0	45.6
<b>Lothian</b>	40	19590	76	15.4	95.7
<b>Mid Scotland and Fife</b>	18	2892	36	7.2	100.0
<b>North East Scotland</b>	27	664	8	1.6	80.0
<b>South Scotland</b>	36	706	9	1.7	100.0

<b>West Scotland</b>	36	1420	6	1.2	77.4
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\* The average litter abundance per 100 meters is calculated based on the median values using a statistical blocking approach. First, medians are calculated for each beach stretch, and then the data is aggregated to the regional level to get the median of medians.

Sewage overflow monitoring by Scottish Parliamentary Region

	<b>Total number of sewage overflows</b>	<b>Number of monitored sewage overflows</b>	<b>Percentage of monitored sewage overflows</b>	<b>Total number of spills</b>	<b>Total spill hours</b>
<b>Central Scotland</b>	422	29	6.9%	2353	26290
<b>Highlands and Islands</b>	681	32	4.7%	4518	26250
<b>Lothian</b>	296	4	1.4%	150	5200
<b>Mid Scotland and Fife</b>	496	11	2.2%	1361	9090
<b>North East Scotland</b>	355	8	2.3%	785	2410
<b>South Scotland</b>	673	19	2.8%	2260	23340
<b>West Scotland</b>	483	12	2.5%	1697	13510
<b>Glasgow</b>	211	8	3.8%	882	7140