

## PROTECT OUR WAVES PETITION

Calling For Official Recognition And Protection For UK Surf Spots

[www.protectourwaves.org.uk](http://www.protectourwaves.org.uk)



A Surfers Against Sewage campaign briefing

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**Surfers Against Sewage**

**Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) is an environmental charity protecting the UK's oceans, waves and beaches for all to enjoy safely and sustainably, via community action, campaigning, volunteering, conservation, education and scientific research.**

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## Aims

The aim of SAS's **Protect Our Waves** petition is to generate at least **100,000 signatures** to highlight the value of surfing waves and locations to the UK **government and** encourage MPs to debate legislation in order to recognise the **importance of waves as a cultural, social, economic and environmental asset** to coastal communities.

SAS believes that waves and surf spots deserve to be seen as part of UK heritage and should be afforded greater recognition and protection through debate and legislation.

### **Protect our Waves in numbers (1)**

- Waves are under threat from 3 sources: new structures and developments, pollution including sewage and litter, and restricted access.
- Multiple surf breaks around the UK are currently under extreme threat with many more subject to lesser, but escalating, degrees of threat.
- No specific laws exist in the UK to protect surf spots
- According to the water industry itself, the number of Combined Sewer Overflow (CSOs) around the UK is around 31,000. Many of these are completely unregulated. (2)
- In the 10 weeks since the 2012 bathing season started this year SAS have issued over 30,000 text messages warning water users about the 416 individual raw sewage discharges across just 62 beaches as part of the Sewage Alert Service.
- The UK's world-class south coast surf spot Broad Bench is off limits for up to 228 days a year.
- The amount of marine litter found on UK beaches has increased almost two-fold in the last fifteen years (3)
- A plastic bottle may persist in the marine environment for more than 450 years if left on a beach.
- Waves are important to coastal communities in 4 ways: economically, environmentally, culturally and socially
- In the UK, there are 4 types of surf spots: beach, reef, point break and rivermouth.
- There are over 500,000 regular surfers in the UK (4)
- In a 2007 Defra survey, the economic value of the surf retail sector was estimated at £200 million annually. (4)
- At a cost of over £3 million, the artificial surfing reef development at Boscombe, Dorset has been estimated to generate £3 million of direct income with an additional £10 million of image value. This is the valuation of a spot that currently only creates poor quality, irregular waves, highlighting the value and exceptional conditions which create the UK's best surfing waves. (4)
- The overall turnover from the surfing industry in Cornwall (£64 million annually) was about 20% more than the sailing industry (£52 million annually), and twice as much as the golf industry (£32million annually). Results also showed that the average visiting surfer spends about 8.5% more in Cornwall than the average visitor. (5)

## Why Protect Waves?

British surfing waves are under threat from a growing number of activities around our coastline that may hamper or have long term devastating impacts on some of our most prized surfing beaches. The most prevalent threats come in the form of coastal developments, pollution, and restricted access.

*“Natural surf breaks should be treated as world heritage sites, and should never be destroyed no matter what the reason... We really can't allow any existing surf breaks to be taken down, for whatever reason.”* **Yvon Chouinard, founder and CEO of Patagonia, Inc.**



Waves are an important and necessary part of the workings of our planet, transferring the sun's energy around the globe. Surfing beaches and waves also have a deep personal value to surfers and surfing communities around the UK. However, in the UK there is currently no specific legislation for the protection of surfing waves or any assurance that stakeholders, including surfers and surfing communities in Wales, Northern Ireland or England (6), will be consulted fairly on activities threatening their existence.

Other sports and activities such as walking and sailing are formally recognized (7 & 8), represented and consulted during many new development processes. Other areas of outstanding beauty and countryside sites are also protected. But politicians, developers and the wider public in general have very little knowledge of the value, uniqueness and finite nature of surfing waves taking into account the unique geological and climatic conditions required to produce good quality surfing waves.

Politicians typically give only cursory consideration to the impacts on local coastal communities, despite the fact that the waves can be central to their existence. We are also seeing growing evidence that the Government is showing a bias towards coastal intervention, together with a stance increasingly in favour of developers.

Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) is campaigning to increase public awareness and develop a greater understanding amongst policy makers that waves are a vital part of the socio-economic fabric of many UK coastal communities, and it is essential that wave-centric communities can amplify their concerns so that irreversible damage is not done to our waves and surfing beaches.





Surfers Against Sewage has set out four key steps to protect the waves:

**1) Increase public awareness:** Geographical features such as mountains and rivers are the most tangible natural assets for people to envisage as elements that should be protected, because they are more or less fixed. The concept that a particular 'wave' needs protecting is, however, much more difficult. One reason for this is that when we refer to a 'wave', we don't really mean just one wave. We really mean the circumstances that come together to make waves break at a particular spot on the coast, in a particular way. Saying that we need to protect the 'right-hander at Thurso East' is a bit like saying we must protect the '09:50 from Paddington to Oxford'. In reality we are not protecting just one train; rather we are protecting the circumstances that allow that service to run.

**2) Become stakeholders:** Surfers and other coastal water-users need an official voice within the politics of a country, in other words, become official stakeholders, this would ensure that their views are taken that much more seriously. A breakthrough has recently been made in Scotland, as a direct result of considerable lobbying by SAS. In February 2010, the Scottish Government recognised recreational water-users' need for a voice on Regional Planning Partnerships within the Scottish Marine & Coastal Access Act. The amendment was forwarded by former Green Party Member of Scottish Parliament, Robin Harper, on behalf of Surfers Against Sewage. A seat on the regional planning partnerships gives recreational water-users the platform to voice any concerns relating to the marine environment and recreational wave resources. Achievements like these set a great precedent, which can be used as an example when justifying that water-users should become stakeholders in other countries.

**3) Surfing reserves:** Another way to protect an area containing good surfing waves is with a surfing reserve. If implemented in a similar way to a bird sanctuary or other type of nature reserve, the surfing reserve could make sure that, at least, certain 'iconic' surfing waves are protected forever. The concept was first introduced in Australia way back in 1973. Even though declaring a spot a surfing reserve in theory won't stop somebody coming along and destroying a wave if they really wanted to, the high-profile recognition of a spot will make a lot more people sit up and take notice if something negative starts to happen. In the UK, surfing reserves could be integrated into sustainable development practices managed alongside the environmental, societal and economic fabric of local communities.

**4) Laws to protect waves:** Laws are needed to specifically protect surfing waves. In the UK, developers already have to go through an expensive and time-consuming process to get planning permission, and this includes passing an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) approved by stakeholders. If there were proper laws stating that surfing waves cannot be interfered with or destroyed, it would be in the developers' own interest to avoid putting their concrete in the wrong place. At the moment, no law exists in the UK to protect surf spots, but it does in one country: Peru. Peru has a history of surfing culture that goes back almost as far as Hawaii, and surfing is seen as a respectable and worthwhile pastime, unlike in many parts of Europe.

#### **What leaders need to do**

1. Waves and surf spots need to be recognized as part of the UK heritage and should be afforded greater recognition and protection.
2. Surfers Against Sewage is calling for legislation to better recognize and protect UK surfing waves and beaches.
3. Revised criteria could work within the existing **Marine & Coastal Access Act**, revised **Bathing Water Directive**, **Water Framework Directive** and the **Clean Neighborhood & Environment Act** or be set up as a new piece of legislation.
4. The first step towards this is a parliamentary debate on the economic and intrinsic value of UK surfing waves and beaches, and a comprehensive understanding of the threats to waves.

#### **Surfing waves are not for sale**

A miniscule proportion of the energy reaching the Earth as electromagnetic waves from the Sun eventually reaches the coast in the form of clean, surfable swell, through a long series of links involving planetary waves, atmospheric waves, wind-driven waves and wave-wave interactions. Surfers then tap into a tiny part of that energy to boost us along for a few seconds. Many surfers around the UK have dedicated a considerable part of their lives to the quest for more and more of that liquid energy.

However, ocean waves were not created for our benefit alone, nor are they some redundant appendage of Nature, serving no apparent purpose in the grand scheme of things. Waves are a very important and necessary part of the workings of our planet.

Surfers have good reason for stopping other people destroying or degrading the waves. But the coastal developers, coastal engineers and politicians responsible for schemes which destroy or degrade surfing waves tend to find the 'intrinsic' value of natural things hard to understand. They only understand the concept of enjoyment if it is bought with money. However, if surfers want to persuade others not to ruin the waves, they need a stronger argument than just a surfing one.

But should we put a monetary value on a surf break? As soon as you put a specific value on a surf break, some people will start to imply that it is potentially for sale. Otherwise, why would you have put a value on it? This then will encourage coastal developers to perform cost-benefit analyses, whereby the value of a surf spot is numerically balanced against the potential income from some scheme that includes destroying that wave. For example, what would happen if we decided that a certain surf spot was worth, say, £10,000 a year, and somebody wanted to build a yacht harbour that would generate an estimated income of £15,000 a year but would destroy that wave in the process? Who decides what to do? Are the developers then in a position to 'buy' that wave from the surfers?

Surfers Against Sewage argues that it is more useful to take a broader approach and show that waves are important to coastal communities in four ways:

- i) Environmentally: Waves form an integral and essential part of a naturally functioning coastline; interfering with waves could affect the physical, biological, geological and chemical stability of the coast – alter them and the entire ecosystems could be unbalanced.
- ii) Economically: Surfers and other wave-lovers bring money into the local community through hotels, shops, competitions and much more, year round. Surfing, unlike most other tourist activities, continues throughout the winter, which gives it additional value.
- iii) Culturally: The UK's waves were first surfed in 1890. Many coastal areas have been defined and characterised by the existence of certain iconic waves and surf spots, Thurso in Scotland and Newquay in England for example.
- iv) Socially: Waves are the central thread to the social integrity of many coastal communities from Cornwall, England to Portrush in Northern Ireland.

### **Ways in which surfing waves can be lost**

There are many ways this can happen; below are just a few examples.

#### **Solid structures and new developments**

Solid concrete structures sticking out of the coast into the sea represent the most common method by which surfing waves are destroyed, and the most permanent. If somebody builds a large concrete breakwater or sea wall which destroys a surf spot in the process, that surf spot is gone forever. An example is the building of a breakwater to stop the wave energy entering a certain area where people want to keep their boats. Most fishing ports were already built hundreds of years ago. Normally the problem nowadays is a yacht marina where people keep their expensive motor boats. In 2008 surfers in Brighton faced this



challenge from a proposed expansion to Brighton Marina, impacting one of the most popular spots on the south coast of England. The council rejected the planning application due to massive public opinion.

Dredging a rivermouth to make the water deeper so that boats can come in and out is also a way of destroying or degrading good surfing waves. Although this method isn't always permanent and doesn't actually involve building a solid structure, it does physically alter part of a natural system.

#### **Pollution**

Contaminating the water alters the waves chemically, but not physically – so you might still be able to see them breaking perfectly, but you can't get in the water to surf them. Pollutants that people put into the sea include heavy metals such as lead and mercury, pesticides, fertilizers, hydrocarbons, nuclear waste and, of course, sewage.

## Sewage

In the UK, one of the biggest pollution problems is still sewage. SAS has been a major influence in improving the UK's sewerage systems but we still have a long way to go. The major threat nowadays is the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) and their misuse by water companies. According to the water industry itself, the number of CSOs around the UK is around 31,000. Many of these are completely unregulated. The CSO is a kind of emergency outlet for the sewerage system, which discharges raw sewage and wastewater into rivers and into the sea when the system is overloaded. Within 10 weeks of the 2012 bathing season starting, SAS issued over 30,000 text messages warning water users about the 416 raw sewage discharges across just 62 beaches as part of the Sewage Alert Service.



## Non-polluting contamination – litter

Another type of contamination which is not always hazardous to our health, but which definitely tends to make our beach and surfing experience extremely unpleasant, includes unnatural objects abandoned by people in and around the marine environment. In other words, litter. This typically includes rubbish that people throw on the beach, objects put into the sea from commercial ships and fishing vessels, industrial waste entering the sea via rivers, and solid items that people put down the toilet also enter the sea via sewage outlets. Most of these things are simply unsightly; but some of them, such as syringes and broken glass, can be very dangerous.

## Restricted Access

The last example of how surfing waves can be taken away from us is when we are simply denied access to them. In this case, the waves themselves might remain undamaged, but somebody decides that the public is not allowed to surf them. In most cases, this is because the area of coast and adjacent ocean containing the waves has been claimed by somebody as their private territory. The Marine and Coastal Access Act, 2009, gives people a right by law to be able to access all the beaches around England, and also provides the right to walk around the entire coast of England via a coast path (7). There appears to be one exception though: the military. The reef/pointbreak at Broad Bench, Kimmeridge is one of England's best waves, surfed by a large number of people. It is also just on the boundary of an MoD firing range, and is out of bounds to the public when firing is taking place. In 2008 the military decided to increase their firing exercises and close off Broad Bench for 228 days a year.



## Offshore Renewables

**Surfers Against Sewage is fully in favour of renewable energy sources, including offshore renewables.**

Just as we can tap off a small amount of wave energy to push us along on our boards, we can also extract energy from the winds, tide and waves and re-direct it to generate energy. However, a priority must always be that renewable energy projects are installed without degrading natural surfing wave resources. SAS has produced a comprehensive guide aimed at developers of offshore renewables (9). The first document promotes the surfing community as an important stakeholder in this sector, within the existing Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, highlighting sites of special surfing interest that developers should consider and avoid. Predicting whether wave energy converters (WECs) are going to ruin waves is not straightforward but can always be assessed on a case-by-case basis. If used effectively it could help speed up the consent process for suitable offshore developments. Fundamentally, the developers need to be made aware of the value of surfing waves, not just to surfers but to the entire community. Until now, companies proposing to deploy wave energy converters have not considered or researched the value of surfing waves, or how their devices might affect them.

## Creating legislation to protect surfing resources



Amending current legislation and potentially passing new legislation could ensure SAS's three main concerns are addressed appropriately. The basis for parliamentary debate and improved legislation could centre around the following:

- The recognition and protection of the dynamics needed to produce surfing waves such as wave height and period; swell direction and distance travelled; peel angle; wind speed and direction and bathymetry/geological features. These are all found within the swell corridor and the coast where the waves break. This could be achieved by amending the Marine & Coastal Access Act 2009.
- The strengthening and enforcement of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) discharge consents to ensure that there are no more than 3 raw sewage discharges during the bathing season and no more than 9 discharges outside the bathing season.
- Delivery of regulation to ensure surfers and recreational water users receive real time warnings about CSO discharges at affected locations. Currently, some CSOs are consented to discharge an unlimited number of times annually. These improvements could be achieved without new legislation with amendments to the Bathing Water Directive and/or the Water Framework Directive, however, Government support is lacking.
- Beach managers should have to carry out at least one beach clean every three months to prevent the dangerous and unsightly accumulations of marine litter. This could be included in a revision to the Clean Neighborhood and Environment Act 2005.



**UK Waves Under Threat – Case studies**



1) Wave: Brighton Marina and multiple south coast surfing beaches  
 Location: South coast  
 Threat: Rampion offshore wind farm reducing wave height by up to 22%  
 SAS Status: Live

2) Wave: Marwick Bay includes a point break, peak and slab  
 Location: West coast of Orkney  
 Threat: Offshore Wave Energy Converter  
 SAS status: Threat on-going

3) Wave: Fraserborough Reef  
 Location: North East Scotland (30 miles north of Aberdeen)  
 Threat: Offshore windfarm cable laid across surfing reef  
 SAS Status: Threat on-going

4) Wave: The Cove  
 Location: East coast between Scarborough and Newcastle  
 Threat: Pollution, still failing outdated minimum bathing water standards  
 SAS Status: Threat on-going

5) Wave: Freshwater Bay point break  
 Location: Isle of Wight  
 Threat: Harbour wall development  
 SAS Status: Early consultation stage

6) Wave: Challaborough  
 Location: nr Plymouth  
 Threat: inappropriate coastal protection scheme.  
 SAS Status: Campaign victory, development proposal retracted after SAS campaign actions.

7) Wave: The Bench AKA Broad Bench. A world class wave.  
 Location: Kimmeridge Bay South coast.  
 Threat: Restricted access by MoD  
 SAS Status: On-going negotiations, potential for legal action

8) Wave: St Agnes & St Ives  
 Location: Cornwall  
 Threat: Dredging  
 SAS Status: On-going.

### **For further information:**

- The Waves Are Resources (WAR) Report highlights why waves are important resources and, as such, why surfing waves should be recognised as valuable assets and protected for present and future generations. <http://www.sas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/The-SAS-WAR-Report-here-on-pdf1.pdf>
- Offshore Energy Guidance: Surfers Against Sewage has produced technical guidance for offshore renewable developers, which highlights sites of special surfing interest that developers should avoid. If the guidance is used effectively it could also help speed up the consent process for suitable offshore developments. <http://www.sas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/eia-1.pdf>
- Sustainable Guide To Surfing (2011): The Sustainable Guide to Surfing is a thought-provoking, challenging and sometimes bleak assessment of the challenges that face our environment and how we, as surfers, contribute to them. But it also outlines how well-placed the surfing community is to influence positive action to tackle these issues and influence the masses to adopt an increasingly sustainable way of living. <http://www.sas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/sustainable-surfing-guide-final-low-res1.pdf>
- Climate Change Report (2007): The report analyses the latest scientific evidence available on climate change in terms of impacts on water quality, sea level rise, coastal erosion, storm tracks, water temperatures and ocean acidification. It also looks at the emergence of the marine renewables sector as one of the solutions to reducing our energy requirements. [http://www.sas.org.uk/pr/2007/docs07/climate\\_change\\_report.pdf](http://www.sas.org.uk/pr/2007/docs07/climate_change_report.pdf)

### **References:**

- (1) SAS WAR Report <http://www.sas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/The-SAS-WAR-Report-here-on-pdf1.pdf>
- (2) Marine Conservation Society <http://www.mcsuk.org/downloads/pollution/CSO%20policy.pdf>
- (3) Marine Conservation Society
- (4) Defra 2007 Charting Progress 2 report
- (5) SWRDA & Cornwall County Council 2004 Study
- (6) In 2010, SAS successfully campaigned to have surfers and recreational water users recognised as stakeholders in the Scottish Marine Act 2010.
- (7) The RYA lobbied for amendments during the 2009 Marine and Coastal Access Act to ensure that the interests and freedoms of the recreational boater were not unfairly compromised by the legislation. When the Act was ratified and became a Bill, the RYA's amendments were carried forward.  
  
Two specific amendments were:
  - The removal of referencing recreational boats within bylaws with reference to MCZ exclusions to ensure they don't restrict recreational boating activities.
  - The RYA also argued (successfully) that socio-economic impacts must be taken into account when creating an MCZ. This was contrary to all other environmental NGOs
- (8) The Ramblers Association were instrumental in the passing of the Countryside and Right of Way Act (2000). This Act opened up much of the countryside to the Ramblers Association members.
- (9) Surfers Against Sewage, 2009. Guidance on environmental impact assessment of offshore renewable energy development on surfing resources and recreation.



WHAT IF THE NEXT WAVE  
NEVER COMES?

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SEWAGE, LITTER AND OFFSHORE  
DEVELOPMENTS ARE THREATENING  
TO KILL OUR WAVES.

SIGN OUR PETITION TO SAVE THEM  
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