

END OF YEAR IMPACT REPORT 2024



WINNING THE FIGHT FOR OUR WILD WATERS

THIS 2024 REPORT SHOWCASES CHANGE-MAKING POWER THE SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE WAY: COLLECTIVE ACTION, CLEAR-EYED CAMPAIGNING AND STRATEGIC ADVOCACY, ALL DELIVERED IN A CRITICAL YEAR FOR THE UK'S WILD WATERS.

Firstly, it's important to say that all our highlights and achievements from the past year were only made possible by the communities we work with, and the trusts, foundations, businesses, supporters, members and partners who work with us to create this impact – so thank you for making 2024 epic.

At Surfers Against Sewage, the issues we work on are born from our heritage. A group of surfers in the 1990's who were sick of getting sick when they entered the water, so they decided to do something about it. Over the past 34 years, we've grown to what is now a vast and diverse network of Ocean Activists, spanning the length and breadth of the UK, all dedicated to driving change which protects our rivers, lakes and coastlines.

Throughout 2024, people across the UK have been fired-up and have stepped-up to take action to protect our blue spaces from the scourge of pollution. Like us, these Ocean Activists understand that 3.6 million hours of sewage pouring into our waterways last year¹ and £80 billion siphoned off to water company shareholders since privatisation just isn't acceptable!

Nor is UK households throwing away an estimated 1.7 billion pieces of plastic packaging per week (almost 90 billion pieces a year).²

¹ Environment Agency update 2024

² The Big Plastic Count 2024





WE COULDN'T BE MORE IN AWE OF THE INCREDIBLE VOLUNTEERS WE WORK WITH EVERY DAY: THROUGH SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES, BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS – TOGETHER WE ARE ALL FIGHTING FOR CLEANER, SAFER WATERS

How do we make people-powered change happen?

It's (kind of) simple:

- We create simple, yet effective volunteer programmes which can be easily implemented into people's lives, and which bolster the evidence-base for our campaigns.
- We stand with our communities on their beaches and riverbanks, and we amplify their work to ensure our programmes have far-reaching positive environmental and social impact.
- We activate a vast community of over 100,000 Million Mile Clean participants, over 670 Plastic Free Communities, over 3,900 schools and over 380,000 users of our sewage pollution alert app (Safer Seas & Rivers Service).
- We speak truth to power and expose the actions of polluters and those complicit in polluting our wild waters.
- We demonstrate public support and people-power through mobilising supporters to participate in physical activations, like our Paddle Out protests and digital actions like the #BanThe Bailouts petition - all created with an expert understanding of how systemic change can happen.

OUR WORK PRIMARILY FOCUSES ON WATER QUALITY (INLAND TO COAST) AND PLASTIC POLLUTION.

We tackle these issues through programmes such as:

- **MILLION MILE CLEAN** – volunteers cleaning-up plastic pollution in their locality (Page 12)
- **PLASTIC FREE COMMUNITIES** – reducing plastic use in towns, villages and cities (Page 13)
- **PLASTIC FREE SCHOOLS** – environmental education and reducing plastic use in schools (Page 13)
- **PROTECTING WILD WATERS** – supporting communities to achieve official bathing water status for their local swim spots (Page 10)
- **REGIONAL REPS** – SAS super-volunteers, engaging their communities across the UK (Page 14)
- **SAFER SEAS & RIVERS SERVICE** – sewage pollution alert app keeping water users safe (Page 11)

We are committed to continue harnessing the power of people to combat plastic pollution and protect UK waters from being used as sewage dumping grounds. From impactful actions to innovative initiatives – we're engaging and equipping communities more than ever before.



WE WILL REMEMBER 2024 FOR MANY YEARS TO COME! IT WAS, QUITE SIMPLY, EXTRAORDINARY. AND THIS IS ALL DOWN TO THE INCREDIBLE WORK OF THE OCEAN ACTIVISTS THAT MAKE UP OUR MOVEMENT – THE SAS TEAM PAST AND PRESENT, AND OUR TRUSTEES, COMMUNITIES AND SUPPORTERS.

As we celebrate an incredible year where ending sewage and plastic pollution are the top two priorities of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I want to say a huge “THANK YOU” to you all and share my appreciation for the thousands of you Ocean Activists that made this a fantastic year.

We ended it totally stoked – tired yes but absolutely exhilarated. As I read back over this report about all that we did and all that we achieved, I find it mind-blowing that somehow, we crammed all this into a single year. These pages are stuffed-full of record-breaking statistics and lists of achievements that we will forever be proud of but what probably does not come across is what this year felt like.

We took every opportunity to stand with community campaigners across the country. In sunshine and rain, we paddled out as one movement, not only on the sea but also inland on rivers and lakes. Together, we reclaimed the places we surf, swim and play from the polluters. We protested and celebrated at the Toxic Trophy and felt the exhilaration of being part of a vast community connected by a love of water. We were part of the sea of blue at the Westminster March for Clean Water which we helped to organise with collaborators River Action.

Working with local SAS Reps and campaigners, to facilitate a hustings event for a couple of hundred people in the mellow evening sunshine on the beach in Hastings, we could feel the crackle of

energy in the crowd as we challenged party candidates to tell us why they should be our candidates for the ocean. We felt united in the crowd. Feeling this was our time to choose how we would sort out the mess that’s been made of our environment.

But most importantly, this year was amazing because we spent time with literally hundreds of people, talking about the anger they felt at the destruction of their favourite “blue places” but also the power they felt through their agency - whether physically removing pollution through a Million Mile Clean or challenging the official line through the collection of citizen science data. Piece by piece we all felt we were making a difference. Our individual efforts were adding up to more – a national demonstration of the demand for significant and systemic change. This felt good. Really good.

TO ALL YOU OCEAN ACTIVISTS POWERING OUR WORK, FROM DONORS TO THOSE TAKING ACTION IN THEIR COMMUNITIES, THANK YOU FOR AN EPIC YEAR. WE HAVE A LOT MORE TO DO TO ENSURE THE RESTORATION AND PROTECTION OF OUR WILD WATERS, BUT WE ENDED THIS YEAR FEELING WE ARE CREATING A BETTER FUTURE FOR THE OCEAN. I HOPE YOU FEEL THAT TOO.

THE BIG WINS IN 2024

THE #ENDSEWAGEPOLLUTION CAMPAIGN:

389,632

**ACTIVE
APP USERS
ON OUR**



**SAFER
SEAS &
RIVERS
SERVICE**

**40,578
PEOPLE**

emailed their Water Company
CEO through the app

**PROTECTING
WILD WATERS**
SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE

70

COMMUNITIES

with our Protecting Wild
Waters campaign to achieve
official bathing water
designation

**15,000
PEOPLE**

attended the March for Clean
Water protest in London

**7,676
SUPPORTERS**

emailed Ofwat's Chair to
demand they hold water
companies to account

5,500

people attended 34

**PADDLE OUT
PROTESTS**

nationwide (the biggest
Paddle Out Protest year yet)

**8,904
SUPPORTERS**

emailed their local MPs to
demand transformational
reform of the water sector

**29,130
SUPPORTERS
SIGNED OUR**

**#BanTheBailouts
petition**

**51 MPS
JOINED OUR WATER
POLLUTION APPG**

(All Party Parliamentary Group)

15 STOPS

on our #EndSewagePollution election bus tour, with

650+ PEOPLE

attending our hustings events

OUR FIGHT AGAINST PLASTIC POLLUTION:

**19,200 STUDENTS
JOINED THE PUPIL POWER
ASSEMBLY ONLINE**



674

Plastic Free Communities
(towns, villages, cities) with

**PLASTIC FREE
COMMUNITIES**
SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE

5,817

Business Champions



**118,288
VOLUNTEERS**

**RAN 4,918
CLEANS**

**TO REMOVE
81,076 KG
OF RUBBISH**

**3,938
SCHOOLS**

signed up to our

**PLASTIC FREE
SCHOOLS**
SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE

ALL SUPPORTED BY 200 AMAZING REGIONAL REPS, LOCATED IN COMMUNITIES
ACROSS THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE UK.

THE WIDER IMPACT



Water Quality



Plastic Pollution

FEBRUARY



Government responds to our asks, announcing a ban on water company bosses receiving bonuses if a company has committed serious criminal breaches.



Increased funding for the Environment Agency (EA) for water company inspections – which are planned to rise to 4,000 by March 2025 and to 10,000 from April 2026.

APRIL



Government commitment to a UK-wide ban on the supply and sale of wet wipes containing plastic.



The Welsh Government promises to include glass in their Deposit Return Scheme, holding strong on their commitment to include the most carbon-intensive material in the scheme.

JUNE



Manifestos of the major parties included significant commitments to reforming the water sector and tackling sewage pollution.

AUGUST



Scottish Government launches consultation on introducing a mandatory minimum charge on single-use cups.

OCTOBER



UK government announced a single-use vape ban from June 2025 (England, Wales), and a ban in Scotland from April 2025.



England and Wales launch review into the whole water industry, promising to deliver long-term transformational reform.

DECEMBER



OEP concludes that Defra, the EA and Ofwat failed to comply with environmental law by allowing CSO's to be used in non-exceptional circumstances.



Scotland finally has a real time sewage map after years of nothing.

MARCH



Environment Agency announces it now has 100% monitoring of combined sewer overflows (CSO's) in England (meeting their end of 2023 target).

MAY



29 new designated bathing sites approved, with 14 of those directly supported by our Protecting Wild Waters programme.



- Water quality was an election issue – on the doorstep and in the media. On the announcement of an election, Sir Keir Starmer's first paragraph talked of the sewage crisis.
- Newly appointed Secretary for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Steve Reed MP) announced at the top of his list of priorities: cleaning up Britain's rivers, lakes and seas.
- A Water Bill to reform the sector announced in the King's Speech.

JULY



- EU regulations introduced ensuring plastic beverages have the cap tethered to the container.
- Roadmap to moving Britain to a zero-waste economy announced second on Steve Reed's list of priorities.

SEPTEMBER



Government introduces the Water (Special Measures) Bill to crack down on Water Companies by blocking bonuses and automatic, unlimited penalties for illegal spills.

NOVEMBER



Government releases a consultation to reform the Bathing Water Regulations.



Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) releases a report on how the Bathing Water regulations could better protect the public.

WATER QUALITY

2024 WAS A MONUMENTAL YEAR IN OUR FIGHT AGAINST SEWAGE POLLUTION, WITH OUR TEAM AND COMMUNITIES WORKING TIRELESSLY TO KEEP THIS ISSUE AT THE TOP OF THE PUBLIC AND POLITICAL AGENDA.

Together, we mobilised thousands of people to paddle out in protest and take digital actions which demonstrated the strength of public feeling on the sewage scandal. From our branded #EndSewagePollution bus, to our visual projection onto the Houses of Parliament - our no-nonsense

approach to campaigning made waves in the media and forced those in power to sit up and take notice. The result? We secured unprecedented commitments from the new government to transform the broken water sector and end sewage pollution.



© Lewis M Jeffries

PADDLE OUT PROTESTS

IN MAY, WE DELIVERED NATIONWIDE PADDLE OUT PROTESTS. WITH 5,500 PARTICIPANTS AT 34 LOCATIONS ACROSS THE UK, THESE WERE OUR LARGEST EVER IN WATER DEMONSTRATIONS.

These water users came together to highlight sewage pollution in our inland waterways and the ocean. Dame Kelly Holmes lent her presence, and we also saw key water quality influencers such as Fergal Sharkey and Lucy Siegle getting involved to highlight the issue of the UK's poor water quality. This action secured over 1,000 media hits, including major coverage on Sky News, ITV News, BBC Breakfast, The Guardian and The Independent; amplifying our message and leaving political leaders and water companies in no doubt about the strength of public backing for this campaign.

Following the Paddle Out, we launched a digital campaign urging people to email Ofwat as they prepared to make a crucial decision on water companies' five-year investment plans. The response was overwhelming, with 7,676 emails sent directly to the Ofwat chair.



© Grant L Winter

THE #ENDSEWAGEPOLLUTION ELECTION CAMPAIGN



Our End Sewage Pollution Manifesto, launched in Westminster in September 2023, set out clear demands for water industry reform.

We utilised this in our campaigning around the General Election, demanding all parties commit to ending the sewage scandal. As the election was announced, we launched an Election Road Trip, taking our #EndSewagePollution branded campaign bus on a nationwide tour.

This whirlwind campaign engaged communities and pressed candidates on their commitments to address the sewage scandal, with 15 stops and 8 hustings resulting in 32 election candidates publicly committing to action. All powered by the amazing energy of our Regional Reps, who led these local events.

Our 'Vote for the Ocean' and 'Vote for our Rivers' poster campaign saw over 15,000 posters displayed in windows nationwide, demonstrating the public's demand for clean water. And most importantly of all, we secured manifesto commitments from political parties and ensured that sewage pollution was a top electoral issue.

THE MARCH FOR CLEAN WATER



IN NOVEMBER, WE PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE MARCH FOR CLEAN WATER, A MASS MOBILISATION OF 15,000 PEOPLE IN LONDON, SUPPORTED BY 140 ORGANISATIONS, ALL DEMANDING URGENT ACTION ON WATER POLLUTION.

The week ahead of the march, we projected our campaign message onto the Houses of Parliament, and published a stinging op-ed which secured national media coverage and let the Government know we weren't going to allow their commitments to end the sewage scandal to be watered down.

Our campaigning efforts, and those of others fighting for our shared cause, were rewarded with the Government announcing an Independent Water Commission that would convene in 2025 and make recommendations to Government on the transformational reform of the sector. A huge win for all Ocean Activists but setting the scene for an even bigger year in 2025.

POST-ELECTION ADVOCACY AND ACTION

Following the election, our campaigning efforts were rewarded by the new Environment Secretary stating his number one priority was cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas. But we weren't going to rest on our laurels. We immediately acted to hold the new government to account with a mass mobilisation email campaign, resulting in 8,904 supporters contacting their MPs demanding urgent water industry reform.

We also established the Water Pollution All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), alongside fellow campaigners River Action. The APPG now has 51 MPs committed to tackling water pollution and Helena Dollimore MP, who engaged with us during our Election Road Trip, became APPG co-chair, strengthening our political influence. We used the APPG to brief and mobilise politicians, ensuring they remained accountable for fixing the crisis.

LONDON PROJECTION EVENT:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBfCUcr3wJM>

AS A RESPONSE TO THE INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF ACTIVITY THROUGHOUT THE ELECTION AND POST-ELECTION PERIOD, DURING NOVEMBER WE PROJECTED VISUALS DIRECTLY ONTO THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT (WESTMINSTER) TO FURTHER HIGHLIGHT THE SEWAGE SCANDAL.

The day after this stunt, the Government announced a full and independent review of the water industry – the largest review of the sector since privatisation to look at water companies and regulators!



LOCAL COLLABORATIVE ACTIVISM

IN 2024, WE EXPANDED LOCAL GROUP COLLABORATIONS, BUILDING STRONG COALITIONS TO PRESSURE THE WATER INDUSTRY AND POLITICAL SYSTEM.

We piloted group attendance at South West Water (SWW) public roadshows, proving the power of collective action and creating a model for nationwide replication.

SWW has long used these events to mislead the public and deflect blame for the sewage crisis. Our presence disrupted this narrative, prompting them to distribute sensationalist materials acknowledging the protests.

Feedback from our new South West coalition confirms the impact—highlighting the strength of grassroots activism and our commitment to standing with local communities.



#BanTheBailouts Petition

Closing the year, our petition for the Government to #BanTheBailouts of the water industry, and demand the amendment of the Water (Special Measures) Bill, was signed by nearly 30,000 supporters. These efforts shaped the political debate and gained verbal commitments from the Government for our campaign calls. However, the Government's reticence to actually amend the legislation, alongside recent developments of the funding of Thames Water, shows we can't let up the pressure.

BAN THE BAILOUTS



**PROTECTING
WILD WATERS**
SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE

PROTECTING WILD WATERS & DRIVING BATHING WATER REFORM

protectingwildwaters.org.uk

At the heart of our fight against sewage pollution is our Protecting Wild Waters programme, which empowers local communities to take action and defend their blue spaces. In 2024, we worked with 70 inland water communities across the UK, supporting their campaigns for official bathing water designation—the only legal tool that forces authorities to monitor bacterial pollution harmful to human health.

Our efforts paid off, securing 29 new bathing water designations, including 14 applications directly supported by SAS.

This marked a turning point, with designated river bathing sites skyrocketing from just 2 to 15 in a single year.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

THE RIPPLE EFFECT REPORT: A WAKE-UP CALL



Published in December, our Ripple Effect Report compiled data from 15 community-led water testing projects. The findings were stark:

- 77% of monitored waterways failed to meet minimum water quality standards.
- The official testing system is outdated, failing to monitor during high-pollution seasons like autumn and winter.
- Key pollutants like PFAs and antimicrobial-resistant bacteria are not even tested under current regulations.

Perhaps most alarmingly, our citizen science results exposed a huge discrepancy between official Environment Agency (EA) ratings and real-world conditions. In one case, EA classified a beach as 'excellent,' while our community data—collected over 16 weeks—showed it as 'poor.' This proves the public is being misled about the safety of their waters.



CITIZEN SCIENCE EXPOSING WATER POLLUTION

To strengthen the case for better protections, we collaborated with Watershed Investigations and the University of York on the UK's largest inland bathing water study. Citizen scientists collected samples from rivers across England, Scotland, and Wales, uncovering shocking pollution levels—including E.coli readings 22 times above safe limits, banned 'forever chemicals,' and pharmaceutical contaminants. This data became a powerful tool in pushing the Government to expand its Bathing Water Policy to address these emerging pollutants.

TURNING CHALLENGES INTO LASTING CHANGE:

DEFRA'S PAUSE ON BATHING WATER APPLICATIONS IN 2024 WAS A MAJOR SETBACK, BUT WE TURNED IT INTO AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEMAND STRONGER REGULATIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, POOR CLASSIFICATIONS FOR MANY BATHING SITES REINFORCED THE URGENT NEED FOR REFORM, DRIVING US TO HOLD REGULATORS ACCOUNTABLE.



© Elliott Glynn

Our advocacy gained momentum, and when the Government finally announced plans to update bathing water regulations, they included demands we've championed for over a decade. But the proposals didn't go far enough, so we've intensified our pressure.

Through relentless community action, citizen science, and advocacy, we are proving that people power can transform water protection laws. We won't stop until every water user has the right to clean, safe waters—year-round, across the UK.

SAFER SEAS & RIVERS SERVICE APP (SSRS)

datahq.sas.org.uk/sewage-data-hq/is-it-safe-to-swim

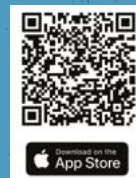
THE SSRS APP REMAINED CENTRAL TO OUR FIGHT FOR CLEANER WATERS, PROTECTING USERS FROM SEWAGE-RELATED ILLNESS, HOLDING WATER COMPANIES TO ACCOUNT, AND DRIVING SYSTEMIC CHANGE.

As the UK's only real-time national water quality service, it covered over 650 locations and was used by nearly 390,000 people, providing alerts on sewage spills and enabling direct action—whether reporting illness or contacting MPs and water company CEOs.

In 2024, we expanded monitoring to more rivers, aligning with our inland bathing water campaign. Key updates improved the user experience and gave start/stop information and location information at bathing waters. We also partnered with the University of Exeter and Galway University through the Blue Adapt project, exploring how users interact with the app when deciding to enter the water.

The SSRS app continues to empower communities, expose pollution, and demand action—driving the change our waters desperately need.

DOWNLOAD THE FREE SAFER SEAS & RIVER SERVICE APP



**KEY STATS IN
2024:**

389,632
Total active users

50,099
Sewage discharge alerts

16,285
Emails sent to MPs

625
Locations covered. (784
including dormant sites)

40,578
Emails sent to water
company CEOs

2,136
Sickness reports
submitted

PLASTIC POLLUTION:

WE UNITE COMMUNITIES TO FIGHT THE PLASTIC POLLUTION CRISIS THREATENING THE OCEAN AND THE UK'S WILD WATERS.

Whether it's cleaning up the places we love or eliminating single-use plastics at source, we're committed to creating lasting change from the beachfronts to the frontbenches.

Plastic pollution has become synonymous with outdoor activities, from surfing to wildlife watching – it is sadly an expected part of the experience. And it's an issue that connects the environment with all parts of society, but it's also something that we can take action to prevent at every level.

In fact, it is only through concrete, collective, positive action that we will be able to stop the flood of plastic pollution from overwhelming our waterways (ocean, rivers, lakes). And we're supporting communities to do just that.



PLASTIC FREE SCHOOLS

plasticfreeschools.org.uk

BY EMBEDDING OCEAN LITERACY INTO EDUCATION, WE'RE EQUIPPING STUDENTS WITH THE TOOLS TO TAKE MEANINGFUL ACTION AGAINST SEWAGE AND PLASTIC POLLUTION.

Plastic Free Schools (PFS) is the UK's leading programme helping schools eliminate single-use plastic, with over 3,900 schools signed-up since programme commencement — 12% of all UK schools.

PFS goes beyond reducing waste; it empowers the next generation with knowledge and practical action. The programme aligns with national curriculum goals and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, providing free resources, teacher training, workshops, and an annual online event to inspire change in schools, homes, and communities.

Driving Action in 2024

This year, we expanded our impact through partnerships and initiatives, including:

- **Let's Go Zero**, supporting schools in their journey to carbon neutrality
- **Running Out of Time**, a nationwide climate awareness relay
- **Global Action Plan**, training young leaders for the Earth Day 2024 Youth Summit
- **The Royal Life Saving Society and Earth Watch Education**, developing life-saving and eco-education activities

KEY STATS IN 2024:

125,344

students from 275 schools signed-up (3,938 total schools)

19,200

participants in Pupil Power Assembly (online event)

5,000

children joined nationwide Trash Mob event (50 schools).

720

children received workshops + 300 teachers trained

285

children visited across 12 schools (education on tour visits)



We also delivered teacher training at the Eden Project, hosted workshops at the Royal Maritime Museum for World Ocean Day, and developed a brand new 'Election Resource' supporting teachers to educate their cohorts on the importance of democracy, using the Surfers Against Sewage manifesto.

Record-Breaking Engagement

Our fifth annual Pupil Power Assembly saw over 19,000 students take part in inspiring workshops featuring speakers like biologist Gillian Burke and lawyer Paul Powlesland. Meanwhile, 5,000 students joined Trash Mob, a nationwide school clean-up where young 'citizen scientists' collected plastic pollution data to support our reports.

By turning eco-anxiety into action, Plastic Free Schools is creating a movement of young environmental leaders ready to make lasting change.

MILLION MILE CLEAN

sas.org.uk/plastic-pollution/million-mile-clean

PEOPLE POWERED ACTION AGAINST PLASTIC POLLUTION

The Million Mile Clean is a unique volunteer movement, mobilising 100,000 people annually to tackle plastic pollution in natural and urban spaces across the UK. Since launching in 2021, over 636,000 participants have removed a staggering 1.3 million kilograms of waste from the environment. These incredible volunteers also collect crucial data to expose the scale of pollution and push for legislative change.

Expanding Impact Through Collaboration

In 2024, we exceeded our targets with over 118,000 participants and 4,900 cleans.

We broadened our reach by collaborating with Waterhau! to remove ghost fishing gear and worked with platforms like Benevity, OnHand and Employee Volunteering to engage businesses in clean-ups.

As an approved activity provider for the Duke of Edinburgh Award, we supported 2,237 students in their volunteering efforts. We also teamed up with several businesses and Plastic Free Communities to run clean-ups nationwide.



118,288

**VOLUNTEERS
MOBILISED**

81,076KG

**OF RUBBISH &
PLASTIC REMOVED**

310,692 MILES

CLEANED

4,918 NUMBER

OF CLEANS

PLASTIC FREE COMMUNITIES

PlasticFree.org.uk

Plastic Free Communities is the UK's largest people-powered movement tackling plastic pollution, uniting thousands of volunteers across rural, coastal, and urban areas. Working with local councils, businesses, schools and community organisations – our grassroots campaigners work on a five-step approach to create long lasting change where they live.

With an estimated 19-23 million tonnes of plastic leaking into aquatic ecosystems annually³, the urgency of this work has never been greater. This year, the team provided one-to-one support to all 674 active communities and directly engaged with 1,220 businesses, ensuring progress and impact. Businesses also displayed the SAS Vote for the Ocean campaign posters, amplifying awareness on high streets nationwide.

During the General Election, the network mobilised communities to challenge local candidates on plastic pollution policies, including the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).



The team also collaborated with SAS campaigners to form the Plastic Pollution Working Group, shaping advocacy for 2025.

Major wins included tangible reductions in plastic waste, for example The Bush Hotel in Farnham cut 4,000 plastic items per month, while Penzance's Golowan Festival prevented 30,000 single-use cups in a single weekend through a refill scheme.

At a national level, grassroots campaigns influenced systemic change. The Scottish government's consultation on a single-use cup charge was directly shaped by our Plastic Free Scotland network, while community efforts helped push the UK government toward its commitment to a zero-waste economy. Through local action and national advocacy, Plastic Free Communities is proving that people power can drive real, lasting change.

³ (UN Environment Programme, Drowning In Plastics report 2021)

KEY STATS IN 2024:

674

total communities with 190 awarded (21 joined this year).

5,817

total businesses (400 joined this year).

4,468

total PFC allies (368 this year).

1,866

total events and actions (213 this year).

303

total Plastic Free Council motions (21 this year).

OCEAN ACTIVISTS EVERYWHERE:

sas.org.uk/take-action/regions

SOME OF OUR PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES FOCUS SOLELY ON WATER QUALITY OR PLASTIC POLLUTION, WHILE OTHERS BRING COMMUNITIES AND VOLUNTEERS TOGETHER TO TACKLE BOTH, ALONGSIDE WIDER OCEAN CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION EFFORTS.

We strive to make Ocean Activism open to all, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to take part. A movement with diverse voices is a movement with greater impact.



REGIONAL REPS

Our Reps programme is the driving force behind our nationwide impact, connecting communities with our campaigns and amplifying our work on the ground. These dedicated volunteers serve as local ambassadors, organising events, leading clean-ups, delivering school talks, engaging in citizen science, and representing us in the media.

The network has grown from 120 active Reps to almost 200 throughout 2024 following a national recruitment drive, with regional Reps now representing every corner of the UK, reaching thousands of people.

This year, Reps led 174 plastic clean-ups, mobilising 3,996 people to remove 3,556kg of rubbish. They played a key role in citizen science water testing, supported youth engagement in Tower Hamlets, and joined major rallies like the Restore Nature Now march and the March for Clean Water.

They also organised 34 Paddle Out protests, bringing 5,500 people together to demand an end to sewage pollution, and represented us at events like Running Out of Time, Out & Wild Festival, and The Big Plastic Count.

In Wales, Reps partnered with Langland Board Riders and the Welsh Surf Federation to relaunch The Toxic Trophy surf competition, highlighting sewage and chemical pollution. Across the UK, they helped identify new swim spots for official bathing water designation. Meanwhile, our HQ team visited the North East and Scotland to strengthen networks and address region-specific water quality and plastic pollution challenges.

Our Reps are at the heart of grassroots activism, shaping the future of ocean protection, one community at a time.





OUR OCEAN SCHOOL BEACH SESSIONS PROVIDED HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN, INCLUDING YOUNG CARERS AND FAMILIES FROM UNDER-RESOURCED COMMUNITIES.

Held on Cornwall's beaches, sessions featured grounding meditations, rock pooling, poetry, and sand art, helping 100 young participants connect with and protect marine ecosystems. Strengthened partnerships with organisations like Go Beyond and Trelya expanded our reach whilst fostering new relationships with groups such as Black Voices Cornwall.

Digital Ocean School, our free, year-round online platform, brought the ocean to children nationwide through 360° videos and interactive activities. This year, we introduced a new underwater scene exploring Cornwall's seagrass habitats and collaborated with schools to produce student-led 360° videos. With 24,647 scene views, the platform continues to foster powerful connections to waterways and the ocean.



WE ALSO EXTENDED THIS DIGITAL EXPERIENCE TO IN-PERSON WORKSHOPS AT VENUES LIKE THE BOX IN PLYMOUTH AND THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM IN LONDON, USING VR HEADSETS TO CREATE UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS. WORKSHOPS IN PLYMOUTH, BRISTOL, AND LONDON HELPED US GATHER FEEDBACK TO REFINE AND EXPAND THE PROGRAMME FOR THE FUTURE.

COMMUNICATIONS

THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM AT SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE ENSURES OUR MISSION IS HEARD LOUD AND CLEAR, INSPIRING COMMUNITIES TO TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT OUR BLUE SPACES.

Raising awareness about the state of our waterways is crucial to keeping sewage and plastic pollution at the forefront of public concern across the UK.

In 2024, we made sewage pollution a front-page issue and a key talking point in the general election. Those in power were listening, and we made sure our message was impossible to ignore.

Media highlights included live coverage on Sky News and BBC Breakfast for our mass Paddle-

Out Protests, plus features on ITV News and in The Guardian, The Observer, The Times, and the Evening Standard. We launched our election road trip live on Good Morning Britain from Windermere and joined BBC Radio 4's Today show to discuss Bathing Water Regulations and our Protecting Wild Waters programme.

We also played a key role in gathering data for Joe Lycett's TV investigation into sewage pollution, with our Science Officer appearing as an expert in 'Joe Lycett vs Sewage', which aired on Channel 4 in February 2024.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS:

📺 INSTAGRAM 181,208

📘 FACEBOOK 166,587

✂️ X 77,514

in LINKEDIN 23,568

🦋 BLUESKY: 487

🎵 TIKTOK: 348

KEY STATS IN 2024:

Total Media Coverage:

10,386

Online Media Coverage:

8,408

Total Website Visitors:

755,000

Broadcast Media Coverage:

1,978

Total Emails opened:

5.1 MILLION

Average Advertising Value of all coverage generated:

£242,354,289

ORGANISATION

BEHIND THE SCENES AT SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE:

OUR DEDICATED TEAM DRIVE THE PEOPLE-POWERED ACTION HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THIS REPORT. WITHOUT THEM OUR PROGRAMMES WOULDN'T EXIST, THRIVE OR CREATE IMPACT.

In 2024, we welcomed 12 new staff members, bringing our team to 50. Our staff turnover rate of 13% and retention rate of 78% reflect a strong, committed workforce. We also expanded our board of Trustees to 10, with the addition of Jen Richardson (charity audit specialist), Tom Lewis (scientist and accountant), and Gabe Davies (Ocean Marketing Manager for Patagonia and British surfing champion), all bringing valuable expertise in governance and development.

June saw a major sustainability milestone as we installed solar panels at HQ, reducing our reliance on the grid by up to 70% and cutting carbon emissions. We also rolled out Phase 1 of our new CRM (customer relationship management) system to enhance supporter engagement. Fundraising and communications are already benefiting from the system, with community and campaign data integration planned for early 2025.

Throughout the year, we revisited our organisational strategy, engaging staff, trustees, and key stakeholders to refine our identity, impact areas, and approach for the second half of the Ocean Decade. This will ensure our work remains aligned with our mission to drive real change.

2024 was also a landmark year for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Kicking off with a keynote speech at the Ocean & Coastal Futures Conference, we reinforced our commitment to making ocean advocacy more inclusive.

As one of the few environmental organisations with a dedicated EDI manager, we are now recognised as leaders in this space. Developing an EDI strategy that integrates into our wider organisational plan is a milestone, positioning us at the forefront of inclusivity in ocean activism.

Working together with external partners we've developed an EDI toolkit for ocean activism. This work has directly impacted our operations, including providing BSL translators at key events for the first time. We've also contributed to sector-wide discussions on inclusion and led new research on the intersection of ocean sports, advocacy, and conservation.

This year, we launched initiatives with underrepresented communities, particularly urban groups, through the EY Foundation Intern Programme and a three-month project in Tower Hamlets. We deepened partnerships with Black2Nature and formed new collaborations with Out & Wild, supporting their festival and mass swim event for the LGBTQIA+ community.

From strengthening our team to expanding our impact, 2024 was a year of growth, connection, and meaningful change. There's more to come in 2025 and beyond, and we couldn't be more excited to continue building impact together. So, thank you for your support and being on this journey with us. For the ocean.



Surfers Against Sewage, Unit 2, Wheal Kitty Workshops, St Agnes, Cornwall, TR5 0RD.
info@sas.org.uk 01872 553 001

Registered in England & Wales No. 2920815. Registered Charity in England & Wales No. 1145877.