

END OF YEAR IMPACT REPORT 2025



A MESSAGE FROM GILES (OUR CEO)

2025 WAS A YEAR OF EXTRAORDINARY MOMENTUM

Across the UK, communities rose up in greater strength and solidarity to demand an end to sewage and plastic pollution — and together, we transformed that anger into action that could not be ignored.

We revealed the true scale of the sewage crisis, rallied people across the nation through our Paddle Out Protests, and even carried our message along the Thames all the way to Parliament's doorstep.

We sat down with government at the highest levels, helped shape national recommendations through the Independent Water Commission, and kept pollution firmly in the national spotlight.

Meanwhile, our communities and activists never stopped fighting on the ground. Through the Million Mile Clean, Plastic Free Schools, the Safer Seas & Rivers Service, and our growing Data HQ platform, people everywhere stepped up — protecting their blue spaces, demanding the truth about pollution, and driving this movement forward.


Every number in this report reflects their determination, their effort, and their refusal to stand by.

But here's what matters most: we turned evidence and activism into influence, and influence into change. Landmark legislation was passed. Water companies committed unprecedented investment to tackle sewage spills.

And the government publicly pledged to deliver transformational reform of the water industry — commitments we will hold them to every step of the way. These victories were hard-won, powered by relentless pressure, strategic campaigning, and people who refuse to accept a polluted future.

None of this would be possible without your support.

Thank you.

Giles Bristow 



**YOU FUEL THE MOVEMENT THAT IS
HOLDING POLLUTERS TO ACCOUNT AND
DEMANDING THE CLEAN, SAFE WATERS
WE ALL DESERVE TO SURF AND SWIM IN.**

WHO WE ARE

FOR MORE THAN THREE DECADES, SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE (SAS) HAS BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE FIGHT FOR POLLUTION-FREE UK WATERS.

Across the UK, our rivers, lakes and seas are being damaged by sewage pollution, plastic waste, and systemic failures in water regulation.

Yet in the middle of this crisis, something remarkable is happening. Communities everywhere are rising. Volunteers are stepping forward. Citizens are demanding transparency. And for the first time in decades, the tide is beginning to turn.

SAS converts this public energy into environmental and political change — turning community action into environmental

transformation through volunteer mobilisation, national awareness, hard-hitting campaigns, political pressure, and uncompromising data-driven accountability.

We tackle pollution because as water users, we experience it first-hand through sight, smell and, sadly, through sickness. Pollution connects us directly to the fate of the ocean. Pollution weakens ecosystems at their core, accelerating biodiversity loss and reducing the ability to withstand climate change. Until we end the pollution of our wild waters, surfers and swimmers aren't safe, and nature can't recover — no matter how much space we give it.



HOW WE MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN:



Evidence: citizen-led evidence and data underpin everything we do — giving us the credibility and mandate to elevate public awareness and influence environmental policy.



Campaigns: our people-powered campaigns shift public behaviour, raise national pressure, and compel institutions to respond.

Mobilisation: we transform individual actions into collective power — mobilising communities across the UK to build the momentum that pushes systemic change over the line.



Advocacy: our reputation gets us in front of key environmental decision-makers — giving us the leverage to push for stronger policies and tougher enforcement.

Visibility: our relentless media pressure keeps pollution in the national spotlight — informing millions and sustaining public demand for lasting progress.

OUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES & PROJECTS:

(runs alongside our advocacy and campaigns work)

SAFER SEAS & RIVERS SERVICE APP (page 6)

A sewage pollution alert app that keeps over 380,000 users safe and informed in the water.

DATA HQ WEBSITE (page 7)

New website showing the operational status of sewage overflow pipes at over 17,000 sites.

PROTECTING WILD WATERS (page 7)

Supporting communities with official bathing water applications to legally improve water quality.

MILLION MILE CLEAN (page 14)

Over 100,000 volunteers per year fighting local plastic pollution through clean-ups.

PLASTIC FREE SCHOOLS (page 15)

Environmental education and reducing plastic use in over 3,600 schools across the UK.

PLASTIC FREE COMMUNITIES (page 16)

Over 6,000 businesses and 640 towns/villages removing single-use plastics from their community.

REGIONAL REPS (page 16)

A network of trained SAS ambassadors highlighting our work in their local communities.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

2025 was a year of undeniable people power. Across the UK, our communities mobilised at a scale we've never seen before — demanding clean rivers, safer seas, and an end to plastic and sewage pollution.

The numbers below don't just tell a story; they prove a movement that is growing, relentless, and impossible to ignore.

158,706
VOLUNTEERS
conducted 6,818
plastic clean-ups
(Million Mile Clean)

72,594 kg
of environmental
plastic/waste
removed (Million
Mile Clean)



329,728
**MILES OF
NATURE
CLEANED**
(Million Mile Clean)




387,697
total sewage
pollution app users
(SSRS app)



SAFER
SEAS &
RIVERS
SERVICE

7,000
attendees across
44 nationwide

**PADDLE OUT
PROTESTS**



642
total towns/villages signed-
up

6,022
total businesses signed up

**PLASTIC FREE
COMMUNITIES**
SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE



34,580
PEOPLE
emailed their water company
CEO or MP (SSRS app)



29,130
PEOPLE SIGNED OUR
**#BAN
THE
BAILOUTS**
online petition




31,634
PEOPLE
completed our
online water
industry surveys



444,099
views on the
**DATA
HQ**
website (water
quality data hub)

17,900
SEWAGE
overflow pipes monitored
(SSRS app/Data HQ website)



6,700
**PIECES OF TOTAL
MEDIA COVERAGE**
(online, broadcast, print)



477,623
TOTAL SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS
532,000 TOTAL WEBSITE VISITORS



**OVER 500,000 VOLUNTEERS,
COMMUNITIES AND
SUPPORTERS NATIONWIDE**

£257
**MILLION AVERAGE
ADVERTISING
VALUE (AAV)**
of media coverage
generated

3,613
**TOTAL SCHOOLS
SIGNED-UP**
**PLASTIC FREE
SCHOOLS**
SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE



26,815 CHILDREN
JOINED PUPIL POWER ASSEMBLY
(Plastic-Free Schools online education event)

THE WIDER IMPACT

In 2025, SAS helped turn public outrage into political action. By exposing the failures driving sewage and plastic pollution, mobilising communities across the UK, and applying unrelenting pressure on decision-makers, we forced these issues to the top of the national agenda. Our campaigns, media coverage and people-powered movement pushed regulators, governments and industry to act — and the ripple effects can be seen in the policy shifts below:

FEBRUARY



Water (Special Measures) Act becomes law, this strengthens the powers of water industry regulators to block executive bonuses, impose severe fines, and increase criminal sanctions for law-breaking water companies. Our campaign ensured a new duty for the financial water regulator to deliver on environmental and climate targets to ensure that the regulator makes decisions for the benefit of the climate and environment, not just about the water companies' bottom line.

MAY



The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) launched a new inquiry into the circular economy — including a call for evidence on the Global Plastics Treaty. This signals parliamentary scrutiny of waste & packaging-related policy.



UK government announced a record of 81 criminal investigations have been launched into water companies following a 400% increase in the number of inspections undertaken by the Environment Agency since the election.

JULY



After an official EFRA Call for Evidence, the UK Parliament's Commons held a general debate on the Global Plastics Treaty on 17 July 2025, led by Alistair Carmichael MP (Liberal Democrat), demonstrating continued political attention to plastics at international and national levels.



Environment Secretary Steve Reed pledges to cut sewage pollution by 50% by 2030.

OCTOBER



Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (EPR) scheme comes fully into effect in the UK. From October, packaging producers have to start paying to deal with the plastic packaging waste they create, shifting the cost away from consumers and local authorities to the polluters themselves.



Water regulator launches consultation to put in place powers in the Water (Special Measures) Act to impose harsher and immediate penalties on water companies for dumping sewage pollution.

NOVEMBER



UK Government announced a ban on wet wipes including plastics, meaning all nations in the UK will have banned plastic wet wipes by 2027.



COP30 held, which saw historic agreement on waste exports being agreed on by the UK and Indonesia.



UK Government publish North Sea Future Plan — which confirmed that the UK will 'cease issuing new oil and gas licenses to explore new fields'.



Circular Economy Strategy launched in Scotland.



Sewage Pollution



Plastic Pollution

APRIL



The next 5-year phase of water company investment begins with Water Companies set to invest a record £104 billion across the UK water industry between 2025-2030. £12 billion is earmarked for projects to reduce storm overflow spills by 45% by 2030. Whilst we don't think this goes far enough, it is a huge improvement on the last decade.

JUNE



Disposable Vape Ban came in.



The Independent Water Commission launched its final report recommending reform of the water system. Changes include the creation of a new super-regulator for water, review of water legislation, recognition of the need to attract long-term sustainable investment, and look at alternative models of governance for failed water companies.



UK government committed to produce a White Paper setting out how they'll transform the water industry and introduce a new Water Reform Bill in 2026 to put these changes into place. The reform will include creating a new super water regulator.

AUGUST



Welsh DRS Consultation launched for a world-leading circular economy scheme that includes glass and enables refill.

SEPTEMBER



Plastic Pollution Plan for Northern Ireland was published for consultation (to which SAS responded). The policy set out to align with the rest of the UK's plastics policy and aims to align with some EU policy.



Emma Reynolds MP, the newly appointed Secretary of State for the Environment, uses her party conference speech to recommit to producing new laws to deliver a 'water system designed for the long term' and 'make polluters pay'.

DECEMBER



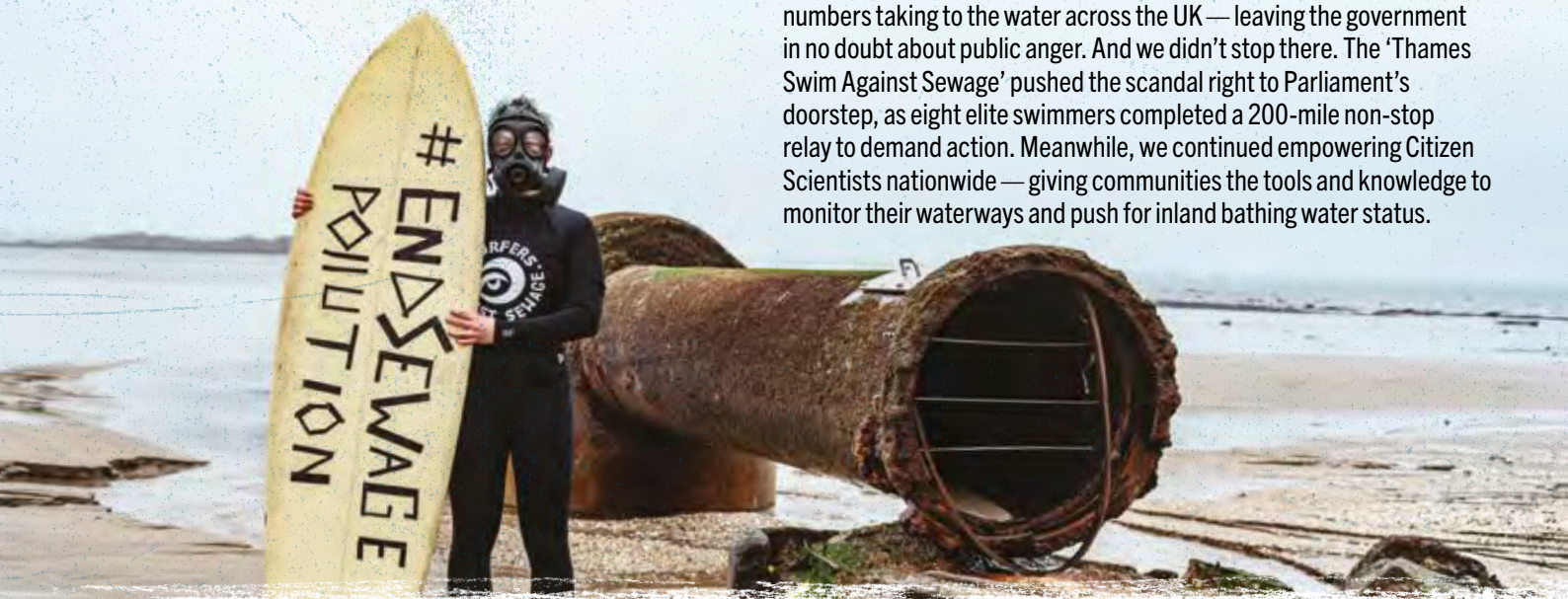
UK Government was due to publish its White Paper for transformational reform of the water sector (pushed back to January 2026).

ENDING SEWAGE POLLUTION

2025 was a watershed year in our fight to end sewage pollution. We exposed nearly 600,000 sewage discharges, forcing the crisis into national view and strengthening our movement like never before.

We demanded a full review of the failing water industry — and secured it. Our influence over the Independent Water Commission’s investigation shaped the national conversation throughout the year. From our #DearJon campaign amplifying the voices of water users, to our Water Quality Report exposing the true scale and human cost of sewage pollution, we kept the pressure firmly on government.

The 2025 Paddle Out Protests were our biggest yet, with record numbers taking to the water across the UK — leaving the government in no doubt about public anger. And we didn’t stop there. The ‘Thames Swim Against Sewage’ pushed the scandal right to Parliament’s doorstep, as eight elite swimmers completed a 200-mile non-stop relay to demand action. Meanwhile, we continued empowering Citizen Scientists nationwide — giving communities the tools and knowledge to monitor their waterways and push for inland bathing water status.



SEWAGE POLLUTION ALERT APP (SSRS)

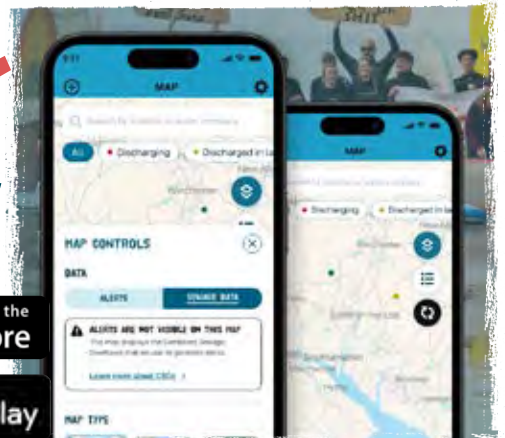
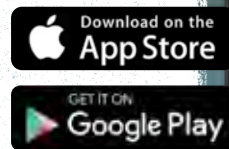
datahq.sas.org.uk/sewage-data-hq/is-it-safe-to-swim

The SSRS (Safer Seas and Rivers Service) app is one of the most powerful tools in the UK’s fight for clean water. Trusted by over 380,000 people, it exposes real-time sewage pollution, protects public health and turns data into action.

The app reveals the reality of UK water quality, opens public access to pollution data and drives national pressure for transparency and accountability — without it, we lose a critical lever for impact.

Free to use, the app provides unbiased, real-time evidence of sewage spills and highlights the risks to human health. It helps people to stay safe in the water — and drives action, from reporting pollution sickness to contacting MPs and water company CEOs.

2025 was a transformative year for the SSRS app, marked by a new developer onboarded, major technical upgrades, strengthened



partnerships, strategic planning to secure the long-term future of the platform and close collaborations with water companies to ensure accurate alerts.

Our standout achievement was completing nationwide CSO (combined sewer overflow) integration. This brought real-time sewage discharge data for England, Wales, and Scotland into the app, added a second national sewage map, and introduced a new interface covering more than 17,900 monitored pipes.

KEY STATS IN 2025:

113,868

new app users
(387,697 in total)

34,580

people emailed their water
company CEO or MP

17,900

sewage overflow pipes live tracked
(SSRS app/Data HQ website)

1,519

sewage sickness reports
logged (7,602 in total)



Launched in January 2025, our Data HQ website is the ultimate hub for water quality data — it shows impact by turning complex pollution data into public power.

With 444,099 views already, this demonstrates just how urgently people want the truth about sewage pollution.

Data HQ remains the only place where real-time sewage discharge history is available for storm overflows — water companies do not provide this information — the service is used by NGOs, such as The Rivers Trust, and linked on many other platforms.

By revealing the operational status of 17,900 sewer overflow pipes, bringing together live and historic data into one powerful map — plus citizen science research and real sickness reports — the website gives the public, journalists, researchers and policymakers a single, authoritative source of evidence.

This matters because transparency drives accountability. When pollution is mapped clearly and publicly, water companies can't hide failures, regulators can't ignore problems, and politicians can't downplay the crisis. Data HQ equips communities with the facts they need to demand action, strengthens national scrutiny, and fuels the pressure for systemic reform.

datahq.sas.org.uk

PROTECTING WILD WATERS
SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE

Protecting Wild Waters is the driving force behind improving inland water quality across the UK — this high-impact programme turns community ambition into legally enforceable change.

We equip local communities with the training and tools needed to secure official Bathing Water Designation — a complex application process many would struggle to navigate without our support.

In 2025, we supported 14 communities with their applications (11 in England, 2 in Wales and 1 in Scotland) and engaged with 100 communities nationwide. With only 46 designated inland bathing sites currently in the UK, our ambition is clear: to clean up the places we swim, paddle and play.

To scale our impact in 2025, we strengthened partnerships with organisations, including The Rivers Trust, Swimmable Cities, British Triathlon, Marine Conservation Society and Swim England.

A major milestone came in May, when we hosted Sir Jon Cunliffe (Chair of the Independent Water Commission) at our Cornwall headquarters. Local campaign groups, bathing-water communities and water-sport businesses joined us to show him first-hand the urgent need for transformational change in the water sector. It was a pivotal moment to influence the national review and ensure community voices were impossible to ignore.

protectingwildwaters.org.uk





I'M NOT A BATHER CAMPAIGN

In mid-2025, our Protecting Wild Waters and Campaigns team launched the 'I'm Not A Bather' campaign — a bold challenge to DEFRA's outdated system, which only counts swimmers in Bathing Water applications and ignores thousands of kayakers, paddleboarders, rowers, and other water users.

The campaign is vital because it exposes a major flaw in DEFRA's system and forces national recognition of the thousands of people who use our rivers and lakes every day. By challenging an outdated definition that excludes most recreational water users, the campaign is unlocking the potential for dozens more protected bathing waters across the UK.

It has already pushed DEFRA to consider change — and with continued pressure, it can secure a fairer, more accurate system that delivers real protections for communities and the blue spaces they rely on.

The campaign runs into 2026, and uses striking, unapologetic visuals to showcase the full diversity of people who rely on our rivers, lakes and seas, putting everyday water users at the centre and amplifying their concerns about pollution.

CITIZEN SCIENCE

WATER QUALITY RESEARCH



SINCE MAY 2025, OUR PROTECTING WILD WATERS TEAM HAS WORKED WITH 35 COMMUNITIES TO CARRY OUT WEEKLY WATER-QUALITY SAMPLING AT LOCAL RIVERS, LAKES AND BEACHES.



The data gathered by these Citizen Scientists is hosted on our Data HQ website, enabling investigations into pollution sources, driving conversations with regulators and water companies, and fuelling media coverage and political engagement with MPs and councillors.

This work is crucial because it turns community-led sampling into national evidence and influence — in 2026 we'll publish a full report on their findings.

This year we also partnered with Earthwatch on their Great UK Waterblitz — a biannual national water sampling effort.

OUR CITIZEN SCIENCE DATA, COMBINED WITH RESULTS FROM 6,000 OTHER VOLUNTEERS, HELPED BUILD ONE OF THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE PICTURES OF UK WATER QUALITY TO DATE.

PARTY CONFERENCES & DEVOLVED NATIONS MANIFESTO

Between September and November, our Policy team hit the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Party conferences to build crucial relationships with key decision-makers — this work is important because it turns political access into real influence.

At both Labour and Lib Dem conferences, we partnered with Paddle UK and Swim England to take MPs and ministers into the water — a bold tactic designed to reconnect politicians with the very environment they are responsible for safeguarding.

The results spoke for themselves: record turnout, with more than 30 attendees at each event. We directly engaged 20 MPs, four government ministers and a Secretary of State — making it one of the most distinctive and memorable moments of the conference season.

Ahead of elections in Scotland and Wales, we worked closely with our Scottish and Welsh communities to co-create manifestos outlining the policy and legislative changes they want their next governments to prioritise to end sewage and plastic pollution.



These manifestos were built from the ground up — shaped by communities, local groups and NGOs who understand the unique challenges and opportunities in each nation. In the process, we strengthened grassroots engagement and forged powerful coalitions committed to ending pollution across Scotland and Wales.

THAMES SWIM AGAINST SEWAGE

youtube.com/watch?v=LXnYjjAXJcA



In September, we teamed up with Olympic and world-class swimmers for a first-ever, non-stop 200-mile swim down the Thames to Westminster — a bold, uncompromising confrontation with the sewage crisis.

This wasn't a spectacle; it was truth-telling in its rawest form. As swimmers pushed through the river, we captured real-time pollution data, documented the health impacts, and exposed the shocking reality of a water system in collapse.

Parts of the Thames were so contaminated the swim had to be halted, with sewage levels more than 4 times the safe limit

and one swimmer hospitalised. Their bodies became living evidence of national failure.

The challenge exploded into the public consciousness, generating 77 major media stories and forcing sewage pollution into the centre of national debate.

It galvanised supporters, energised communities, and injected new urgency into the fight to End Sewage Pollution. The journey — captured in a powerful mini-documentary — stands as a visceral wake-up call to government: the crisis is real, the evidence is undeniable, and action can't wait.

WATER POLLUTION APPG



Our joint Water Pollution APPG (All-Party Parliamentary Group) with River Action was the backbone of our political engagement in 2025 — it was a powerful forum uniting MPs to drive action on pollution in Parliament.

Our APPG work showed that we could shape political action, unite cross-party support and drive real scrutiny of those in power. Throughout the year, we mobilised the APPG at key parliamentary flashpoints, ensuring politicians were equipped, informed and ready to act when it mattered most.

The standout moment came in June, when MPs and Lords held a committee-style session grilling the Chair of the Water Commission on his interim report and pushed him to go further. Alongside this, we delivered packed briefing sessions, submitted parliamentary questions and helped spark debates that kept pressure firmly on the government.



Our events have been consistently well attended — and, crucially, genuinely engaging. No box-ticking. Real scrutiny, real questions, real commitment. The APPG now boasts more than 50 members from across parties and both Houses — a growing cross-party force demanding action on pollution.

WHEN SEWAGE STOPPED THE SURF!



In September 2025, Surfing England's Interclub Surfing Championships in Cornwall were halted mid-event after a sewage discharge forced more than 140 competitors out of the water.

Acting fast, we secured major national coverage — from the BBC and The Times to The Mirror and The Independent — marking the first time a sewage-cancelled surf contest hit the UK news agenda at this scale.

The incident was later raised in Parliament, amplifying the urgency of the issue. Our rapid response also reignited conversation across the surfing world. Influential surf media outlets and podcasts picked up the story — driving reengagement and debate across clubs, beaches, and online communities.

This momentum fuelled deeper engagement with the UK surf community — including presence at the London Surf Film Festival, Newquay Surf & Skate Expo, and engagement with the North Sea Surf Film Fest — turning a crisis into a powerful catalyst for change.



10 DOWNING STREET VISIT

In August, we took our campaign straight to the heart of power. Alongside River Action, we met with the Prime Minister's advisors inside 10 Downing Street to deliver a clear message: the public demands a complete transformation of the water industry.

This level of access signals something important — our movement is being taken seriously at the highest levels of government. What once felt impossible is now firmly on the table — meaningful, systemic reform of the water industry in the public interest.

INDEPENDENT WATER COMMISSION & WATER REFORM BILL

Ahead of the Water Commission's interim and final reports, we led a 36-organisation coalition to issue a powerful open letter demanding bold government action to end the profit-driven sewage scandal.

Representing voices from trade unions to grassroots campaigners, ethical brands to sustainable banks, the letter secured national media coverage and helped shape the public narrative ahead of the Commission's findings.

We also produced a major report on global water company models, ownership, and financial structures (in partnership with River Action and Seahorse Environmental). This report, setting out the principles we needed a new system to deliver, was submitted to the Water Commission.

Our engagement throughout this process was extensive — from roundtables with Chair Sir Jon Cunliffe, detailed policy discussions with civil servants, to facilitating direct conversations between SAS communities and the Commission.

This work shaped the narrative ahead of a major government review, and directly influenced the Water Commission's recommendations — creating the political pressure and evidence needed to drive long-overdue reform of a failing water system.

In June, the interim report echoed our core argument: that the current system is failing, and deep reform is essential. In July, the Independent Water Commission's final report released 88 recommendations; our research was repeatedly referenced in these recommendations — clear evidence of our influence. SAS helped define the problem, supply the evidence, and mobilise the public pressure — all of which fed directly into the Water Commission's reports.

Yet progress stalled, the government delayed the Water Reform White Paper (the plan on how they will overhaul the UK's failing water system) — pushing publication into January 2026.

At the same time, DEFRA confirmed that water companies are failing to deliver promised reductions in sewage discharges near bathing waters — sewage is still flowing across almost the entire UK coastline. Until transformation of our broken water system becomes reality, we will keep pushing relentlessly — until our waters are finally protected.





Photo: Annie Taylor Creates

PADDLE OUT PROTESTS EVENTS

In May, more than 7,000 people took to the water (and the streets) for 44 Paddle Out Protests across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

From 34 beaches to 10 inland locations, and even our first-ever urban, non-water protest in London, communities showed up in force to demand clean, safe blue spaces. The movement was impossible to ignore. With over 440 pieces of regional and national media coverage, water quality shot straight back onto the public and political agenda.

And the momentum didn't stop there. After the Paddle Outs, 3,000 supporters emailed their elected representatives across the devolved nations, pushing them to take action on sewage pollution — bringing the total to 12,000 emails sent since October 2024.

The Paddle Outs demonstrated our ability to turn public frustration into coordinated national action and force politicians and the media to pay attention.

By uniting thousands of people across all four nations, we generated huge media visibility, and converted that energy into direct political pressure — a clear sign of a movement with real influence and momentum.



TELL YOUR POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVE TO

#END SEWAGE POLLUTION



EMAIL YOUR POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVE

In May, we activated thousands of people to take their fight straight to the source of power. Our 'Email Your Political Representative' action gave the public a direct line to the decision-makers responsible for protecting our rivers, lakes and seas — and demand they step up.

This wasn't a symbolic gesture. It was a vital push for bold, systemic reform of the water industry and an end to sewage pollution. And it worked: 13,895 constituents contacted their representatives across the UK, making it impossible for politicians to ignore the scale of public anger — or the urgency for change.

By enabling constituents to contact their representatives, we have the power to mobilise the public at scale, influence political priorities, and make sewage pollution an issue politicians can no longer sideline.

WATER QUALITY REPORT '25



sas.org.uk/resource/water-quality-report-2025

In April, we released our Water Quality Report — and it exposed the true scale of the sewage scandal. Water companies dumped an astonishing 4.7 million hours of sewage into UK waterways in 2024 alone, across 592,478 spills. The report laid bare a system in freefall: record discharges, a growing public-health crisis, failing water companies, financial mismanagement, broken promises, and a business model built on pollution for profit.

Our goal was clear — force this crisis into the mainstream and make it impossible for politicians, the public and the commission to ignore. And it worked. The report generated 592 pieces of national media coverage — from the BBC and Sky to The Guardian — keeping water quality firmly in the spotlight and strengthening our call to end profit from pollution.

We had turned hard data into national urgency; by exposing the sheer scale of sewage dumping and framing it as a system in collapse, we positioned ourselves as the leading voice holding water companies and government to account. The huge media reach ensured the crisis dominated public conversation, pressured politicians, and reinforced SAS as the key organisation driving the narrative, setting the agenda and demanding an end to profit-driven pollution.

#DEARJON CAMPAIGN & SURVEYS

During March and April, we teamed up with 38 Degrees to facilitate mass engagement which fed into the Independent Water Commission's public call for evidence.

This included running a digital action on social media called #DearJon, where we engaged key water-sports athletes and influencers to send a strong message directly to Sir Jon Cunliffe (Independent Water Commission). We saw thousands of ocean advocates create and share video messages for Sir Jon — and this campaign put public voices at the front of our demand for change, enabling thousands to speak directly to the Independent Water Commission and shaping the national conversation through lived experience.

We continued being a powerful conduit for public pressure and democratic accountability by running two public surveys on sewage and the water industry: one in-depth survey with 38 Degrees (28,458 responses), and a shorter survey (3,176 responses).

These surveys highlighted widespread public dissatisfaction with the current system, particularly around sewage pollution, corporate profits and lack of accountability. The survey data also highlighted strong public support for greater transparency, tougher regulation, and exploring more sustainable and publicly accountable models of ownership.



In January, our #BanTheBailouts petition closed. This petition was a call for the Government to put a ban on bailing out the water industry and demand an amendment to the Water (Special Measures) Bill — the petition amassed 29,130 signatures from concerned members of the public.

We were able to turn public anger into tangible political pressure and show that opposing bailouts of water companies wasn't a fringe concern, but a mainstream demand. That visible public mandate helped shift the political debate, forcing ministers to respond — and ultimately securing verbal commitments from the government that aligned with our campaign goals.

#BAN THE BAILOUTS

ENDING PLASTIC POLLUTION

2025 marked the launch of The People vs Plastic (PvP) campaign — uniting our entire network to take decisive action on plastic pollution and sharpening our campaigning focus.

Our PvP national day of action saw everything from local protests to mass clean-ups across the UK. In Cornwall, 500 people formed a human chain along a seafront — a powerful symbol of communities protecting the ocean and demanding action at the source.

We carried that momentum to the Global Plastic Treaty talks with a clear manifesto, compelling community stories, and creative actions that couldn't be ignored.

THE NEGOTIATIONS MAY HAVE STALLED, BUT OUR PRESSURE ON THE UK GOVERNMENT HASN'T.

MEANWHILE, OUR COMMUNITIES KEPT DRIVING CHANGE ON THE GROUND DELIVERING:

6,818 Million Mile Cleans, growing to

642 Plastic Free Communities, and reaching

3,613 Plastic Free Schools.

Proof of what's possible with determination and collective action.



MILLION MILE CLEAN

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

The Million Mile Clean (MMC) is one of the largest people-powered environmental movements of its kind in the UK, with more than 100,000 volunteers taking part every year, and 795,443 participants since 2021.

This nationwide plastic clean-up initiative has real, measurable impact — through the removal of tonnes of plastic pollution from natural places and urban spaces. But its power goes far beyond litter-picking. The MMC is one of our strongest public engagement engines — a movement that turns individual action into national pressure. Every clean builds community ownership and brings new people into the fight against plastic pollution.

The programme also generates one of the UK's richest citizen science datasets on plastic waste. Volunteers record what they find, helping us track pollution trends, identify major polluters and expose the systemic failures driving the crisis. Through the MMC programme we can keep plastic pollution visible, mobilise one of the largest environmental volunteer forces in the UK, and turn their action into national pressure to ensure that polluters and politicians cannot look away.

158,706

CLEAN-UP VOLUNTEERS

72,594KG

ENVIRONMENTAL PLASTIC /WASTE REMOVED

329,728 MILES

CLEANED

6,818 CLEANS DELIVERED

PLASTIC FREE SCHOOLS

plasticfreeschools.org.uk

Our Plastic Free Schools programme is one of the UK's largest pupil-powered education movements, transforming how children aged 2–16 engage with the environment.

Now ongoing in 3,613 schools, it equips young people with the knowledge and confidence to tackle plastic pollution, climate change and ocean recovery — while driving the UK's leading effort to eliminate single-use plastic from schools.

Since January, our Education team has been on the road, re-engaging schools across the UK through workshops, teacher training and in-class sessions. We also partnered with Earthwatch to create a new residential teacher training weekend, strengthening teachers' understanding of ocean literacy and embedding environmental learning more deeply in classrooms.

This year, our young people took centre stage in major national moments — from our nationwide 'Pupil Power Assembly' to creative protest actions during The People vs Plastic campaign. Their voices, ideas and leadership continue to shape the movement.

In November, we welcomed the Government's curriculum review, which proposes embedding climate change and sustainability more deeply across key stages. This marks long overdue recognition that environmental education isn't optional — it's essential.

Every child deserves to understand the world they're inheriting and how they can protect it. With free, ready-to-use resources and a growing network of empowered schools, SAS is making sure they can.



KEY STATS IN 2025:

26,815	children joined our online education event, Pupil Power Assembly
9,242	children reached via events (e.g., National Maritime Museum, London)
3,613	total schools in the programme
418	educators/teachers reached through in-person events

OCEAN SCHOOL 2.0

2025 marked the development of Ocean School 2.0 — a bold new chapter in our ocean education journey. We began bringing together the strongest elements of our existing programmes to create an accessible, ready-to-use resource that anyone can pick up, anywhere.

This integrated model will unite Digital Ocean School, Ocean School and Ocean Literacy into one powerful framework — designed to move children from awareness to advocacy and help them become confident ocean champions within their schools, families and communities.

The Digital Ocean School website continued to thrive as a free, anytime-anywhere learning platform, engaging children through interactive activities and immersive videos that connect them to the ocean, even if they've never seen it (28,815 total views).

Ocean School, our in-person programme for disadvantaged children, paused early in 2025 as we explored how to scale its impact. It will now be woven into the wider Ocean School 2.0 model to reach far more young people. This summer we partnered with two museums, the National Maritime Museum in London and the National Maritime Museum in Cornwall.



In Cornwall, our Ocean School team brought educational, fun family activities to museum visitors, from discovering the ocean food chain, to creating ocean-inspired artwork — with all participants receiving an official SAS Ocean Activist Certificate. This was a key partnership as the museum has over 125,000 visitors per year.

In London, during the National Maritime Museum's World Ocean Day, we connected thousands more with their shared ocean. Visitors discovered how to become SAS Ocean Activists through our interactive display — a huge opportunity in a venue with over 2.5 million annual visitors. These partnerships strengthen our mission to make ocean education accessible nationwide and empower the next generation of ocean activists.

In 2025 we commissioned a 3-minute animation, our first Ocean Literacy resource. This will launch on World Ocean Day 2026.

PLASTIC FREE COMMUNITIES

plasticfree.org.uk

Plastic Free Communities (PFC) is the UK's largest people-powered movement tackling plastic pollution, uniting thousands of people in urban, rural and coastal locations nationwide.

Participants in towns and villages across the UK are driving long-term plastic reduction by uniting individuals, businesses and organisations to reduce single-use plastic usage — collectively, their action-taking on the ground is triggering change at the top.

PFC communities also mobilise nationally, exposing the scale of the plastic problem using strong evidence, highlighting the worst polluters and the potential impact of key policies such as DRS



(deposit return scheme) — a proven strategy to get government, brands and retailers to feel the resulting weight of public pressure and act on it.

In 2025, PFC supercharged their localised work so they could harness a collective national voice and use people-powered action during national and global moments. The two main moments were The People vs Plastic protests (a national day of mobilisation in July) and the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations.

KEY STATS IN 2025:

642

total communities in the PFC programme
(34% awarded, 25 new sign-ups)

6,022

total businesses signed-up
(80% awarded, 209 new sign-ups)

5,105

total community allies
(620 new allies this year)

2,960

events & actions
(293 new events this year)

4,450

individuals engaged through action plans

REGIONAL REPS & COMMUNITY WEEKEND

sas.org.uk/take-action/regions

Reps are vital because they turn our national mission into real, visible change on the ground, using their local leadership and community connections to drive action against both plastic and sewage pollution across the UK. Their knowledge, deep community ties, and lived experience help us understand what's happening locally and shape how we respond together.

In 2025, our Reps engaged in a huge variety of work. They hosted community plastic clean-ups, conducted talks in schools, organised mass attendance events and worked on creative initiatives to connect their communities with our national campaign moments (e.g., Big Spring Clean, People vs Plastic events).

In February, we hosted a Community Weekend in Sheffield, uniting passionate changemakers from across our programmes — Regional Reps, Plastic Free Communities, Protecting Wild Waters and Ocean Network members — all under one roof. The goal was simple: connect, collaborate and rally behind our 2025 goals to amplify impact nationwide. The weekend delivered inspiring talks, hands-on campaigning workshops and powerful volunteer connections that fuelled momentum across the movement.



SAS CURRENTLY HAS 178 REPS IN TOTAL SPREAD ACROSS THE UK (128 IN ENGLAND, 25 IN WALES, 6 IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND 19 IN SCOTLAND).



THE PEOPLE VS. PLASTIC

CAMPAIGN & PROTESTS

In July, we launched The People Vs Plastic (PvP) — a bold new public campaign designed to ignite SAS's plastic pollution movement and put plastics firmly back on the public, political and media agenda.

PvP was built to mobilise our existing communities, bring in new supporters, build national momentum and equip our Ocean Activists with the tools they need to act and push for systemic change.

A defining moment came with the People Vs Plastic nationwide actions in July, when 114 events took place across the UK as communities came together to confront plastic pollution and call for stronger government accountability. Volunteers from Plastic Free Schools, Plastic Free Communities and the Million Mile Clean all joined forces.

A FLAGSHIP EVENT IN CORNWALL SAW MORE THAN 500 VOLUNTEERS FORM A HUGE HUMAN CHAIN ALONG THE SEAFRONT — A POWERFUL, UNMISTAKABLE MESSAGE TO POLLUTERS THAT THE PUBLIC HAS HAD ENOUGH.

Across the UK, creativity and activism collided: a 'plastic beach' and mock Deposit Return Scheme in Weston-super-Mare; a Plastic Litter Parade and a washed up mermaid tangled in ghost gear in Falmouth; film screenings and plastic pollution sculptures in Saltburn; and dozens more actions across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Together, these events showed the strength of a movement that refuses to stay silent — and a public ready to take on the plastics crisis head on.



THE BIO-BEAD & OGMORE TYRE SCANDAL

In November and December, our coastline was hit by a shocking sight: millions of toxic bio-beads scattered across beaches from East Sussex to Kent. These tiny pellets — meant to clean our wastewater — became a symbol of a system in freefall.

We moved fast: rallying communities, launching a national survey, and gathering stories from those living through this unfolding disaster. What we're hearing is frightening, and it's only the start. We're turning this evidence into action — demanding clean-ups, transparency, and real accountability.

No community should ever again wake up to beaches littered with toxic plastic from a system that was supposed to protect them. In May, SAS joined more than 90 organisations for Wales' largest-ever river clean-up at Ogmore — a response to one of the most shocking pollution incidents the region has seen.

VOLUNTEERS HAVE ALREADY PULLED 8,000 TYRES AND OVER 10 TONNES OF WASTE FROM THE RIVER.

Yet the scale of the dumping is even worse: an estimated 13,000 tyres were discarded here. This is environmental damage on a staggering level, and the work is far from finished.

SAS Reps actively contributed to the clean-up effort, whilst also running an information stall to engage with local residents about SAS's mission, and our activity in the area. This is a long-term fight to restore a river that has been systematically harmed.



WALES & NORTHERN IRELAND PLASTIC CONSULTATIONS

In September and October, we continued working closely with our communities across the UK (including the devolved nations) to gather plastic pollution data for our 2026 Brand Audit — a flagship report exposing the country's top polluters. Once published, this evidence will continue to power our policy work.

Welsh Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) consultation: We submitted a strong response in support of Wales' ambition to deliver a world-leading DRS that includes glass and supports refill and reuse. Our submission was grounded in evidence from our Brand Audits, Million Mile Clean data and insights from Plastic Free Communities — bringing the reality of plastic pollution from the beachfront directly to the frontbench. We also partnered with other NGOs to produce guidance that helped the public submit informed, evidence-based responses.



Northern Ireland Plastic Pollution Plan consultation: We also responded to Northern Ireland's consultation, ensuring community voices were heard. Using data from our Brand Audit and plastic programmes, we made the case for clear plastic-reduction targets and alignment with UK and European bans — pushing for stronger, more coherent action across borders.

GLOBAL PLASTICS TREATY & EFRA EVIDENCE SUBMISSION

In August, SAS attended the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations in Geneva, reporting live across media channels and working alongside UK eNGOs, Break Free From Plastic and the Global Plastics Treaty Coalition to push for an ambitious, legally binding agreement.

Our highlights included publishing an exposé on the treaty process, calling out the top polluting brands present, amplifying frontline community voices, reconnecting with the global eNGO movement and challenging the plastics lobby head-on.

We went to Geneva with a clear demand: for the UK Government to champion a treaty that cuts plastic production, bans the most harmful plastics and chemicals, accelerates a global circular economy, and holds polluters to account.

But the talks collapsed with no agreement — after high-ambition countries, including the UK, refused to back a treaty that failed to include plastic-reduction measures. The failure of the negotiations makes one thing unmistakably clear: the UK now urgently needs strong, binding domestic legislation to tackle plastic pollution.

Before the treaty, in June, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) launched an inquiry into the UK's progress towards a circular economy and its position ahead of the treaty. SAS submitted detailed evidence, outlining what a credible global treaty must deliver and the steps the UK should take both at home and internationally.

Our submission drew on the full strength of our plastic programmes: Million Mile Clean data revealing the scale of pollution, and case studies from Plastic Free Communities showing how real change is already happening on the ground.



THE KING DOES A BEACH CLEAN (AND STRANGER THINGS TOO!)

In July, we were honoured to welcome His Majesty King Charles III to a beach clean in Kent, joining our CEO Giles and several of our Regional Reps.

A lifelong advocate for environmental protection — speaking about it decades before it entered mainstream debate — His Majesty's presence was a powerful public endorsement of our movement. His support underscored a simple truth: plastic pollution affects everyone.

We also saw national attention surge when Jamie Campbell-Bower — a lead cast member from Netflix's *Stranger Things* — joined our Wittering beach clean with local Rep Mark.

MOMENTS LIKE THESE AMPLIFY OUR MESSAGE AND SHOW THAT THE FIGHT AGAINST POLLUTION RESONATES FAR BEYOND THE ENVIRONMENTAL WORLD.



CITIZEN SCIENCE

PLASTIC POLLUTION RESEARCH



In May, a scientific paper was published in which 97 of our Citizen Scientists participated. The report was a collaborative research project with the National Geographic Society, the University of Plymouth and ZSL — a first-of-its-kind research paper on plastic pollution trends across the UK.

SAS volunteers collected over 27,000 plastic items over a 5-month period, and the research, which was published in the *Marine Pollution Bulletin* showed that the UK's coastline holds 60% more plastic pollution than inland areas, with coastal areas showing a significant influx in new plastic waste in comparison.



MEDIA & VISIBILITY



Surfers Against Sewage doesn't just fight pollution — it fights silence. And that's why media coverage and strong PR aren't optional extras; they are the lifeblood of our movement.

POLLUTION INCIDENTS OFTEN START AS SMALL, LOCALISED SCANDALS. WITHOUT MEDIA AMPLIFICATION, THEY STAY HIDDEN, CONVENIENT FOR THE POLLUTERS, AND UNCOMFORTABLE FOR THE COMMUNITIES SUFFERING THE CONSEQUENCES.

Our Communications team transforms these isolated stories into national conversations. It forces water companies, regulators, and politicians to confront what they'd rather ignore. Every headline is a spotlight, and every spotlight is pressure. Environmental battles are won not only in courtrooms or boardrooms but in the court of public opinion.

Our media coverage helps people understand the scale of the sewage and plastic pollution crisis, the science behind it, and the human impact. It builds empathy, outrage, and ultimately, momentum for change. Without our relentless media coverage, the truth stays in the shadows.

This year, we also launched a partnership with the National Maritime Museum Cornwall for their SURF! Exhibition (runs until 2027).

The exhibition explores Cornwall's surfing heritage and features a dedicated section on the history of Surfers Against Sewage — recognising our pioneering role in blue health. Curated by surf academic Dr Sam Bleakly and expected to attract over 125,000 visitors annually, it offers a powerful platform to reach both local audiences and visitors from across the UK.



KEY STATS IN 2025:

6,700

pieces total media coverage (print, broadcast, online)

£257 million

in Average Advertising Value (AAV) of all coverage generated

532,000

total website visitors

125,000

total email subscribers

477,623

total social media followers



ORGANISATION

A HUGE HEARTFELT THANKS

None of the achievements in this report would be possible without the Trusts & Foundations, Businesses, Philanthropists, and Supporters whose investment powers this work — their backing drives communities, campaign teams, and volunteers to take action every day.

This support is central to every success: exposing sewage failures that force policy change, mobilising over 150,000 people to remove plastic pollution, reaching more than a million school children, and helping to secure legislation that holds polluters to account.

With the UK's seas under unprecedented threat, this collective support fuels one of the country's most effective, people-powered forces for ocean protection — delivering measurable impact now and for generations to come.

OUR 35TH ANNIVERSARY

Surfers Against Sewage marked its 35th anniversary in 2025 with a homecoming celebration in our village in St Agnes, Cornwall. This family-friendly SAS Ball brought the community together with live music, talks, workshops, and a shared sense of purpose. It was a proud, joyful reminder that a movement born on a small Cornish coastline can spark national change.

BEHIND THE SCENES

We are powered by an extraordinary force behind the scenes at Surfers Against Sewage — our Operations team which cuts across office, people & culture, finance, governance and risk. Their steady, skilled and often unseen work is the backbone of

this movement. They shape our culture, strengthen our systems, drive our sustainability efforts and turn strategy into action. From refining how we operate to embedding equity and inclusion across the organisation, this collective dedication fuels every campaign, every breakthrough and every impact we make for the ocean.

STRATEGY, CULTURE, HR & EDI

In 2025, we began shaping our new five-year strategy with a clear ambition — to define how we create meaningful change, and how we can do it with greater power and precision. Our leadership team and trustees undertook a deep review of our approach, and with support from an external consultant — we aim to refine this into a focused, high-impact plan.

This work is ongoing into 2026, and it has helped us sharpen the connection between our communities and our campaigns, give greater strategic focus, and clarify how data and evidence will both inform our campaigns and evaluate their impact. Our Operations team strengthened our culture and governance to ensure all 56 staff work with clarity and alignment. Grounded in our values and shaped by staff feedback, this work has created a clear cultural vision that enables implementation of our new strategy. Staff retention remained exceptionally strong at 94%, reflecting a committed and motivated team.

From an EDI perspective, a significant step was a full sector-wide evaluation, now informing our first-ever EDI strategy, with clear, time-bound actions for every team to embed equity, diversity and inclusion across our work. We also updated all organisational policies and rebuilt our recruitment process to identify and address barriers.



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