



**The Northern Ireland Marine Task Force (NIMTF) is a coalition of non-government environmental organisations – it includes RSPB, Ulster Wildlife, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, WWF Northern Ireland, National Trust, Friends of the Earth, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, and Northern Ireland Environment Link. The NIMTF has the support of approximately 100,000 local people. We are working towards healthy, productive and resilient seas for Northern Ireland.**

Northern Ireland Marine Task Force response to:

[Call For Evidence on a Plan to Eliminate Plastic Pollution in Northern Ireland](#)

Submitted on 30/09/2021

**1. Detail any actions that you or your organisation has been involved in with the aim of tackling plastic pollution in Northern Ireland and which could be used as an exemplar in the Northern Ireland plastic pollution plan. Please provide supporting evidence where possible. These actions could range from large scale operations such as implementing a policy or removing single use plastic from an organisation, to smaller grassroots actions, such as organised litter picks. (Max. 500 words)**

The Northern Ireland Marine Task Force welcome this Call for Evidence as part of Northern Ireland's plans to eliminate plastic pollution. As identified in the consultation document '*in Northern Ireland, 78% of all marine litter found on our beaches is made up of discarded plastics and around 80% of this originates from land-based sources*'. Therefore, it is clear that to adequately solve the issue of litter and plastic pollution in the marine environment, strategic cooperation among different land and marine policy teams and organisations is needed, through which long-term, fully resourced action can be implemented.

Globally every year, it is estimated that millions of tonnes of litter end up in the ocean worldwide, posing environmental, economic, health and aesthetic problems. Poor practices of solid waste management, wastewater (including stormwater) collection and treatment, lack of infrastructure and awareness of the public at large about the consequences of their actions aggravate substantially the situation<sup>1</sup> resulting in marine plastic ingestion, suffocation and entanglement of hundreds of marine species as well as the impact on food and health, the further exacerbation of climate change and negative impact on tourism and livelihoods. Marine litter is also one of the clearest symbols of a resource inefficient economy. Valuable materials are polluting our beaches and damaging our environment instead of being pumped back into our economy. Therefore, a circular economy approach that puts the emphasis on preventing waste and on recycling and reuse of materials and products in the first place, is the best solution to the marine litter problem<sup>2</sup>.

Ulster Wildlife, an eNGO in Northern Ireland and member of the NIMTF coalition, carry out beach cleans with schools and as open events to the public. Ulster Wildlife also organise 'extreme beach

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/good-environmental-status/descriptor-10/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/good-environmental-status/descriptor-10/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/good-environmental-status/descriptor-10/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/good-environmental-status/descriptor-10/index_en.htm)



cleans' on Mew Island and the Copeland Islands so to tackle the problem of marine plastic pollution in the less accessible areas around the NI coast and which requires boat access. Additionally, UW encourages the public to reduce their single-use plastic consumption through online campaigns such as Plastic Free July<sup>3</sup> and provision of resources on the website<sup>4</sup>. Ulster Wildlife also encourages all volunteer anglers involved in their Sea Deep project to recycle their fishing line through the Anglers National Line Recycling Scheme. There are two recycling bins in Northern Ireland (Ivy Lodge Carp Fishery in Lisburn and Rooney's Fishing Supplies in Newcastle).

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, an eNGO in Northern Ireland and member of the NIMTF coalition, are involved in a swathe of different projects and initiatives which contribute directly to the elimination of plastic in Northern Ireland. These include; supporting litter picks through the Live Here Love Here project partnership; The BIG Spring Clean; Healthy Oceans, Healthy Minds; and the Adopt A Spot initiative. KNIB also work closely with DAERA to carry out critically important litter data collection without which, much of the work to deal with the plastic pollution problem in Northern Ireland would not have been possible. KNIB also focus effort on helping councils, businesses, schools and the general public to reduce plastic use and litter, and are currently leading important campaigns on the issue, most notably; the Tackling Plastic and Forever Fashion campaigns.

National Trust, an eNGO in Northern Ireland and member of the NIMTF coalition out beach cleans of various scales across properties within their care<sup>5</sup>. Beach cleaning takes places regularly on beaches with large visitors numbers, using a combination of staff and dedicated volunteers. During July and August, daily beach cleans take place on the Blue Flag sections of NT beaches at Murlough, Portstewart Strand and White Park Bay. National Trust have also organised beach cleans around the Giants Causeway where they have worked with a number of local stakeholders and volunteers to clean the less accessible bays, which requires boat access. Pre-pandemic NT would have a few large beach cleans per year with corporate groups; these are slowly starting to return across sites.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ulsterwildlife.org/plastic-free-july>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ulsterwildlife.org/help-wildlife/help-wildlife-home/help-sea-creatures/how-use-less-plastic>

<sup>5</sup> **Belfast:** We do a beach clean twice a year at three of the Islandmagee sites: Skernaghan Point, Portmuck and Ballykeel. We usually pull about half a dozen bagful's from Skernaghan, the other two would be slightly less. It's so small scale it doesn't require much organising or a big group, so usually a couple of rangers and maybe a couple of volunteers at a push. The tides around Islandmagee don't seem to draw detritus in, not in the same way you see it at some of the Co Down beaches. **Murlough:** Pre-pandemic we would have a few large beach cleans per year with corporate groups, these are slowly starting to return. During July and August we have daily beach cleans on our Blue Flag section of Murlough Beach by staff (funded by NMDDC). We would generally pick any large items washed up on Murlough beach too, we pick up quite a few vehicle tyres which are costly to dispose of. We have taken part in the MCS Big beach clean but haven't had the resource to do this over the last couple of years. We would hope to do it next year. **Strangford:** We undertake beach cleans on Strangford Lough several times a year. We usually do this with large volunteer groups such as business in the community. This Autumn will we focus on the stretch of coastline from Greyabbey Bay northwards to Newtownards Sailing Club. **North Coast:** <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/environment/cleaning-up-giants-causeway-coast-is-giant-task-38073116.html>



**2. Have you any plastic pollution suggestions that you would like to include in the Northern Ireland plan which you feel have not been addressed by government or by another scheme? Please provide supporting evidence where relevant. (Max. 500 words)**

In June 2013, the Northern Ireland Marine Litter Strategy was published by the then Department of the Environment, and stated that *‘Northern Ireland’s coast is a major environmental and economic asset. It provides an important social and cultural function, sustains coastal communities and industries and is home to a number of productive and biologically diverse ecosystems. It is therefore essential that this important coastal resource is protected from the damage caused by marine litter’*. More than eight years later, the exact same is true today. However, despite 78 measures outlined in the strategy to tackle marine litter, the problem is now worse than it has ever been. Furthermore, the NI Marine Litter Strategy was developed with a view to reassess its progress in 2020 with the intention of publishing an updated strategy thereafter. This has not occurred, and NIMTF would strongly encourage DAERA to begin this piece of work immediately.

The Marine Strategy UK process which aims to drive the improvement of UK seas towards ‘Good Environmental Status’ (GES) is nearing the end of its second cycle of target and indicator setting, monitoring and programme of measures implementation. One of the descriptors upon which the success of the framework is judged is marine litter. Unfortunately, according to the most recent assessment in 2018 *‘the UK has not yet achieved its aim of Good Environmental Status for litter. Beach litter levels in the Celtic Seas have remained largely stable since the assessment in 2012, whilst beach litter levels in the Greater North Sea have slightly increased’*.

It is critically important that DAERA engage fully and urgently with the latest programme of measures designed to tackle the issue of marine litter and plastic. Developing a new Northern Ireland Marine Litter Strategy is one important aspect of MSUK success, but on its own will not deliver GES. With an appropriate level of policy ambition, followed up with adequate financial resourcing, long-term projects, initiatives and campaigns can help bring about positive consumer and business behaviour change which will reduce the amount of plastic which is produced and used in NI.

**3. Have you, or your organisation, any solutions or sources of evidence and expertise that could be used to help eliminate the problem of plastic pollution in Northern Ireland? These could include examples from elsewhere that have benefited or discouraged action on plastic pollution, or any challenges or opportunities you have identified. (Max. 500 words)**

Sectoral initiatives which specifically tackle plastic and litter issues in different industries are needed in Northern Ireland. Fishing 4 Litter for example, is a highly successful project which has been trailed throughout the UK and including at some harbours in NI. This project works alongside industry to reduce fishing gear-related marine plastic and litter pollution. It needs to be financially resourced in the long-term and rolled out across all harbours and fishing ports across NI’.

*‘The project is designed to reduce the amount of marine litter in our seas by physically removing it and to highlight the importance of good waste management amongst the fleet. Fishing for Litter is a*



*simple idea. Participating vessels are given hardwearing bags to collect marine litter that is caught in their nets during their normal fishing activities*<sup>6</sup>

**4. Any other comments or contributions that will help inform the plan and the commitment by the NI Executive to eliminate plastic pollution. (Max. 500 words)**

NA

**Contact:**

**Dr. Donal Griffin**

**Northern Ireland Marine Task Force Officer**

[donalgriffin@nimtf.org](mailto:donalgriffin@nimtf.org)

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.fishingforlitter.org.uk/>