

## Plastic marine litter and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park

### Description



Camus Rory with Sgurr na Ciche behind. Photo credit Tom Colville

Following my post on litter and outdoor recreation ([see here](#)), I was contacted by Tom Colville who had visited Knoydart a few days before me in his boat. He confirmed my observations that litter was confined to the coasts and noted that it was particularly prominent along the outer part of Loch Nevis and that “the small inaccessible craggy bays opposite Inverie, were strewn with the largest heaps of marine detritus”. Unfortunately he had no photos but did send me one from Ulva, now owned by the local community, taken the year before along with some commentary:



Photo and text Tom Colville

*â??In May 2022 I found a flotsam littered high waterline on the south side of Ulva at Carraig Bay where it was impossible not to walk on the accumulated plastic debris. So few people will ever see this type of place. The entire high waterline was plastic trash. Several larger pieces of flotsam, now washed up in there, obviously had broken from pontoon systems far, far upwind. These parts are actually clearly visible on Bing maps satellite view. â?•*

*â??The real problem is that on an entrapment bay such as this â?? open to the west and south west the lighter flotsam gets blown well inland in severe storms. Bottles and canisters, bags and plastic cups etc. are carried up slopes. Stuff from the high water lines can be found tangled in vegetation even hundreds of yards inland, carried uphill by the wind during severe storms, and of course broken antlers, and carcasses of deer are sometimes found snagged in ropes and netsâ?•.*

Tomâ??s comments reminded me that I had been meaning to blog about the Scottish Governmentâ??s approach to marine litter at Loch Long, which forms an enormous â??entrapment bayâ?• in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. A month ago the local MSP, Jackie Baillie, asked the Scottish Government three questions about this in the Scottish Parliament.

## **The Scottish Governmentâ??s responses to Jackie Baillie**

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**1) S6W-17196 Jackie Baillie:** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle marine litter.

**Mairi McAllan:** *The Scottish Government is tackling marine litter with actions detailed in our Marine Litter Strategy ([see here](#)) which aims to address the amount of litter entering the marine environment, to achieve ecological, economic and social benefits. Our Strategy and action plan was refreshed in September 2022 and focuses on the most problematic types of marine litter including fishing and aquaculture gear, sewage-related debris, and plastic pellets. The Strategy will drive forward our work over the next five years and co-ordinate the efforts of our stakeholders and partners, working at a national and international level to help tackle this global problem.*

*The many actions include: improving the management of end of life fishing and aquaculture gear to reduce litter and improve recycling rates, contributing to our circular economy; working across the UK administrations to put an end to pollution caused by wet wipes containing plastic; and developing international solutions to prevent spills of plastic pellets (nurdles), which can be found on our beaches and risk the health of our marine wildlife. In addition to preventative actions, we are also supporting litter removal, whether off shore through the funding of KIMO's Fishing for Litter scheme, or at our rivers, with Keep Scotland Beautiful's Upstream Battle project.*

**Comment:** yet another Scottish Government strategy full of fine words but very few concrete actions. Whether all the 'improving', 'contributing', 'working' and 'developing' has actually changed anything for the better since the Marine Litter Strategy was first issued in 2014 is unclear.

**2) S6W-17197 Jackie Baillie:** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the pilot work to tackle litter sinks at the head of Loch Long at Arrochar.

**Mairi McAllan:** *Since the inception of work to better understand the Arrochar litter sink in 2017, we have determined that approximately half of the litter has originated from the River Clyde catchment, and half from the open sea. We are using this knowledge to focus efforts on tackling the source of the litter over which we can have most influence, that from the River Clyde.*

*As such, the recently updated Marine Litter Strategy for Scotland includes actions on riverine litter, to prevent it and to support its removal. Our key delivery partner Keep Scotland Beautiful and their Upstream Battle project enables communities, businesses, and schools on the River Clyde to develop local solutions to reduce littering, and also support its clean-up. This initiative also supports citizen science and the outputs will inform further riverine litter policy, aiming to reduce and intercept litter before it reaches our seas. In addition, we are also engaging with Glasgow City Council to consider more options to increase litter removal from the River Clyde.*

**Comment:** the claim that the area over which the Scottish Government has most influence is riverine litter is highly misleading and is actually contradicted in the Marine Litter Strategy. Much of the litter in the Clyde Estuary and elsewhere on the coast of Scotland originates from the fishing industry whose vessels are licensed through Marine Scotland. The Scottish Government could use those licensing powers to impose stringent controls on the industry but has chosen not to do so.

**3) S6W-17195 Jackie Baillie:** To ask the Scottish Government what information it has on how much has been spent on tackling litter sinks at Loch Long in each of the last 10 years, and how much will be

spent in 2023-24.

**Mairi McAllan:** *The bay at Arrochar was chosen as the location of a marine litter case study in Loch Long in 2017. Since then, a total of Â£183,827.78 has been spent on litter removal at the site. This includes the cost of heavy machinery contracting, haulage, and the disposal of the mixed debris. Costs have varied annually according to the amount of material washed ashore requiring removal.*

Date	Amount spent (Â£)
May 2018	Â£29,720.35
May 2019	Â£36,787.69
March 2020	Â£37,686.83
March 2021	Â£25,310.11
March 2022	Â£54,322.80

*Funding of these clean-ups has been provided when available. There is currently no funding allocated for the same operation in the financial year of 2023-24. This work is eligible for funding through Marine Fund Scotland <https://www.gov.scot/policies/marine-and-fisheries-grants/>*

**Comment:** The Marine Litter Strategy issued last September reported that the Scottish Government had committed Â£500,000 to begin to address the problem of litter sinks around the coast and to develop policy to address marine plastics, which has involved working with community groups. Arrochar (Loch Long) was identified as a case study area and is being monitored and maintained. 1,002 tonnes of litter has been removed from this litter sink between 2018-2022. A year later no funding has been allocated to fund the clear-up of litter at the head of Loch Long where the rubbish on the beach was clearly visible from the road a few weeks ago.

While prevention is important what Loch Long and all the other litter strewn beaches around Scotland shows is the amount the Scottish Government has allocated to clearing up marine rubbish is insufficient. The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority could have been taking a lead here, either by calling on the Scottish Government to provide far more financial support to the local community at Arrochar, who have been trying to address for years, or on Argyll and Bute Council to use some of the monies they have raised through their extortionate charges at the Cobbler car park to be used to clear up the eyesore on the beach beyond. Instead, they have done nothing.

## How effective is the action being taken to prevent plastic entering the sea?

The Marine Litter Strategy implicitly recognises that plastic is the most significant cause of marine pollution and includes a number of actions to reduce the amount that enters the sea. To date, however, these are piecemeal and fail to tackle the cause of the problem.

As Tom Colville put it:

*I am old enough to remember a cruising visit to Canna in the late 1960s. The outer High waterlines in clefts to the east of the village bay did trap plenty of tidal debris. Some fragments of*

*flotsam, including broken wood, hatches and doors etc from the convoys and the many hundreds of wartime ships lost, 15- 20 years before, still remained. Back then commercial fishing gear along the Atlantic seaboard still largely consisted of wooden fish crates, hemp ropes and tarred nets with cork floats. We could also find many of those beautifully coloured heavy Glass fishing floats which I was told were still in common usage in Spain and Portugal? 'back then?' although slowly being replaced by spherical alloy ones. No plastic?!*

In the last fifty years, plastic has replaced a multitude of different materials and is now omni-present on both land and sea. Tinkering around the edges as the Scottish Government has done though its ban on plastic-stemmed cotton buds and carrier bag levy is unlikely to do much to reduce the amount of plastic entering our seas. As one plastic item is banned, another becomes prevalent, like the millions of plastic tree shelters being funded by the Scottish Government through the forestry grants scheme and being used across our National Parks.

We therefore need a comprehensive plan across Scotland which aims to stop using or to replace plastics where possible by products that are carbon neutral, i.e not a byproduct of the oil industry, and not polluting to the natural environment. The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority could be playing its part in this, prompted (or shamed?) by the plaster litter sink on its patch at the head of Loch Long. However, despite its professed wish to put climate and nature first in its new draft National Park Partnership Plan currently out for consultation ([see here](#)), there is not even a mention of the word plastic, let alone any proposals that would reduce its use. A ban on plastic tree shelters would be a small start.

### Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

### Tags

1. Litter
2. LLTNPA
3. Scottish Government

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