

# ENJOY AND PROTECT

## Water Sports Guide







## ABOUT ENJOY AND PROTECT

For over 20 years, the Clean Coasts Programme has been working with communities to help protect and care for Ireland's waterways, coastline, seas, ocean, and marine life, by organising hundreds of beach clean-ups each year, mobilising thousands of volunteers, and removing large quantities of marine litter from our coastline.

The Irish coast offers breath-taking views, beautiful beaches, epic cliffs, and more, and its unique beauty and character has been attracting visitors from all over the world - did you know that some of the coastal areas in Ireland have been named top tourists' attractions in Europe, ranking higher than other famous landmarks including Buckingham Palace, the Eiffel Tower, and the Leaning Tower of Pisa?

The Irish coast also presents its visitors with numerous opportunities to have fun. In the summer months, we expect that more people will be visiting the beautiful coastal areas around the country, whether it is for sea swimming, water sports, or simply to enjoy the stunning landscape.

With our 'Enjoy and Protect' campaign, we are asking people to enjoy and celebrate our stunning coastline, beautiful beaches, epic cliffs, and all outdoors areas, but also to protect these natural treasures. Get out and make the most of Ireland's wonderful coast, but also do you part to preserve our marine environment and keep it safe and beautiful for future generations to enjoy too.

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The Clean Coasts programme is proudly sponsored by  
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Fáilte Ireland.



An Roinn Tithíochta,  
Pleanála agus Rialtais Áitiúil  
Department of Housing,  
Planning and Local Government



**Fáilte Ireland**  
National Tourism Development Authority

# SECTION 1

## MAKING THE MOST OF OUR BLUE SPACES

### A GUIDE FOR WATER SPORTS ENTHUSIASTS

As an island nation we are fortunate enough to have over 3,000km of coastline right on our doorstep, perfect for swimming, surfing, kayaking, wind surfing, paddle boarding... the list goes on! We encourage everyone to get out there and make the most of these incredible blue spaces, but we're also conscious that our outdoor pursuits can have a huge impact on the natural environment.

We've developed this guide full of information and advice on helping to protect the marine environment and the biodiversity that calls it home, while you're out enjoying all the wonderful water sports, Ireland's coastline has to offer.

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**‘Our precious Coast and Biodiversity is honoured worldwide. Stop, Take time and look.’**

**Jim Kennedy, Atlantic Sea Kayaking**





# SECTION 2

## MARINE LITTER

### 2.1 Ireland's Wildlife Conservation

In Ireland, we are lucky to have a variety of marine, coastal and inland habitats that host a diverse range of flora and fauna. These habitats are home to 51 mammals, 457 birds, thousands of marine and land plants, over 11,000 insects, hundreds of marine fish and more. Many of these areas require protection as they are of the utmost importance for wildlife conservation. To protect these habitats, EU legislation designates certain areas as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), under the Habitats Directive, and Special Protected Areas (SPAs), under the Birds Directive.

#### Special Areas of Conservation

The habitats and species within SAC sites are important not only from an Irish perspective but also at a European level. There are currently 439 SACs in Ireland. The Directive lists certain types of habitats and species that must be protected within an SAC. Irish habitats that require protection include raised bogs, blanket bogs, turloughs, sand dunes, machair (flat sandy plains on the north and west coasts), heaths, lakes, rivers, woodlands, estuaries, and sea inlets. There are 25 Irish species which must be afforded protection under the Habitats Directive, and these include salmon, otter, freshwater pearl mussel, bottlenose dolphin and Killarney fern.

#### Special Protected Areas

SPA designation is specific to the protection of birds and focuses on listed rare and vulnerable species, regularly occurring migratory species and wetland habitats, especially those of international importance. In Ireland, we have 165 SPAs including both coastal and inland sites. Many transiting waterbirds find respite in the wetlands of Ireland during our mild and wet winters. Over three-quarters of a million of these waterbirds migrate to Ireland each year as they travel to more southerly sites or spend the whole winter here. While over half a million seabirds make their way to Ireland's coastal habitats to find a suitable breeding habitat each year.

If you are unsure if the area where you are planning your outdoor activity is protected, please check out this NPWS(National Parks and Wildlife) [online map](#) displaying all protected sites in Ireland.



## 2.2 Sand Dunes

As a coastal protection programme, we work with many Clean Coasts communities who are dedicated to protecting their coastal sand dunes systems. These groups have voiced concerns about an increase in activity on sand dunes along the coastline. Walking, camping, sports training, horse-riding, quad/ dirt biking and lighting fires/ BBQ all have a negative impact on these fragile habitats. Dunes are mounds of sands supported by a marram grass root network which helps to stabilise them, as a result they are not as stable as the ground found further inland. Dunes are not only an important habitat, they are also a natural coastal defence safeguarding communities from flooding. Often the public are not aware of this, or they may deem their interaction with sand dunes as low impact. However, if you multiply the many thousands of low impacts interactions made by the public along our coastline you can see where a significant issue might arise.

Once damaged the dunes are left exposed and susceptible to blowouts or collapse resulting in sand blowing onto land, roads,

and nearby buildings. This often occurs in winter when storms return, and the visitors have long gone home. For this reason, we would ask you to reconsider picnicking and camping in sand dunes.

## 2.3 Impacts of Litter and Plastics

Up to 80% of marine litter comes from land-based activities and at Clean Coasts we promote the “Source to Sea” approach as the first port of call in preventing litter from getting into our marine environment. Plastics makes up 80% of all marine litter and annually the UN estimates that up to 10 million tonnes of litter is entering the marine environment. If current consumption patterns and waste management practices do not improve, by 2050 there will be about 12 billion tons of plastic litter in landfills and the natural environment. Plastics can take between 450 and 1,000 years to break down when they enter the marine environment, but rather than disappearing altogether, plastics end up breaking down into smaller fragments known as microplastics, which in turn negatively impacts the natural environment.





# SOURCES OF OCEAN PLASTICS & MARINE LITTER

- Litter dropped in towns and cities
- Overflowing litter bins
- Litter dropped at the beach
- Poorly managed industrial waste discharges
- Lost shipping containers
- Lost/discharged fishing gear
- Recreational litter blown by the wind
- Poorly managed landfill sites
- Microbeads from personal care products
- Sewage related litter





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‘Paddlesports are an incredible way to enjoy the stunning coastlines and waterways all over the island of Ireland.

As we enjoy the natural wonders offered up to us on the water, we have a responsibility to protect and preserve these water environments. Simply being mindful of your impact on the surrounding environment while entering and exit the water with a canoe or kayak can be a great first step. Better again use your boat to collect any litter you see around the coast while out on the water’.

**Samuel Curtis**, Canoeing Ireland





## SECTION 3

# WATER SPORTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

We know as a water sport enthusiast you already have an innate connection to the environment. Being in or on the water surrounded by nature is an incredible feeling and hopefully these tips will help keep these spectacular blue spaces healthy.

### 3.1 Top tips for an environmentally friendly outing

#### Litter:

- Pack it out Pack it in - Keep track of any packaging you bring with you to the beach whether it's a coffee cup, food wrappers or labels from new kit and pop it in your bag to take home or dispose of in a nearby bin.
- We all love the cuppa tea and chats after being in the sea – cut down on waste by bringing your drinks in a flask
- Take home all your belongings – Many of our garments are made using polyester, nylon and acrylic which are all types of plastic that take a long time to break down. Make sure all your belongings are secure and located back from the tideline (check the tide times!) – flip flops can easily be washed out and clothes and robes blown away in a windy exposed spot!
- Use a reusable container – e.g., waterproof bag, plastic trug / box to store your wet gear instead of using plastic bags.

- If you smoke or vape, make sure to dispose of your cigarette butts and empty vapes appropriately – these items can be especially damaging to marine life.

#### Beach Amenities

- If you're making use of beach toilets and drains make sure to Think Before You Flush and avoid flushing items such as wet wipes, cotton buds, plasters, or other items down the toilet.

#### Travel:

- Chose to swim locally to avoid unnecessary car journeys – we all discovered our local swim spots in lockdown so cycle and walk to your nearest spots if possible.
- Walk part of the way to the beach – the walk back to the car is great for warming you up!
- Share a lift with a buddy – For water sports we might need to transport extra kit so walking isn't an option, but carpooling can be a big help. This also cuts down on the number of vehicles parked at these sometimes very delicate and vulnerable ecosystems.
- Avoid driving or parking on the beach or dunes.

## Biodiversity:

- Be mindful of all wildlife as it is their home you are enjoying.
- Enter and exit the water at designated access points such as on a blue flag beach or pontoons to avoid trampling or dragging equipment through delicate habitats like sand dunes or reed beds.
- Don't swim near reeds as you could disturb nesting birds.
- Stay off the Sand Dunes as they are very delicate.
- Be mindful of what cosmetics, suncreams and topical medication you use prior to a swim as these chemicals will wash into the water and cumulatively effect the water quality.



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**My top tips for an eco-swim are; If you wear earplugs, please invest in a set that are attached together with a cord which can thread through your goggles or get a pair moulded to avoid earplugs falling out into the sea. Encourage your swim tribe to take part in a clean-up of your local swim spot – keeping it clean avoids the waste being washed into the water with the high tides and stormy weather.**

**Lisa McDaniel, Open Water Swimmer**



## 3.2 Organising a Beach or Sea Clean up

A great way to mesh your sport and protecting the marine environment is to organise a clean-up based along the coast or on the water. Water based clean ups can be a great way to collect litter from locations difficult to access by foot, but extra precautions are needed – see below for more information on Health and Safety.

### How to organise a group clean up:

1. Register as a Clean Coasts group – Once you have registered your group you will be put in touch with a clean coasts officer in your region who can offer advice and support, you will also have access to our kit offerings and community grant scheme.
2. Choose an area you think would benefit from a clean-up.
3. Complete a Risk Assessment of the area and assign a health and safety officer for your clean-up / group.
4. Check the tide times ahead of your clean up.
5. Notify your Local Authority of the time/date of the clean-up, if possible, a week in advance, to facilitate the efficient management of all rubbish and recyclables after the event.
6. Publicise the success of your clean-up on social media, take a photo and tag us on Facebook/Twitter/Instagram at @CleanCoasts, we'd love to share your images.



### Clean up Tips!

- Bring an extra bag to the beach to pick up litter you find along the way – a beach clean can be as simple as that!
- Litter can often gather in harbours and bays – difficult to access on foot but easy to reach by kayak, canoe, or SUP.
- Use netted bags for water based clean ups – these help the water drain away so you're not carrying extra weight.
- If you're out on a kayak or canoe trip – fill your boat on the way home with litter, you find along the way.



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Stand Up Paddling (SUP) is a wonderful way to experience the outdoors – the rivers, the canals and the coastline are our playgrounds.

SUP brings us so much pleasure but how long before these fragile environments are destroyed and lost to the future generations?

So, what can we do to help? How about organising an SUP adventure, or paddle session where you collect some rubbish / litter. From a morning potter along the canal to a long weekends adventure trip along a stretch of coastline. Remember to enjoy yourself but never overlook safety. Plan your paddle trip well and make sure that conditions suit your skill level and experience.

Paul Byrne, Irish SUP







### 3.3 Health & Safety for all Clean Up types

- Please carry out a safety briefing before all clean-ups, especially for new volunteers.
- Ensure that all volunteers are aware of location of the First Aid kit.
- Ensure at least one person has a mobile with signal before starting the clean-up.
- Please wash hands before and after the clean-up.
- Gloves should be worn throughout clean up.
- Wear High Visibility clothing.
- Report sharp objects, such as broken glass and syringes to Safety officer - any such items should be removed by adults only and placed in a sharps box, not rubbish bags.
- Persons under 18 years should be supervised at a ratio of at least one adult to every five children.
- If something is heavy, please ask for help.
- Please adhere to any weather warning that are in place at the location of the clean-up.

#### **Water Clean-ups:**

- o Never enter the water when working in a canal or river clean-ups. Never work on your own, use "Buddy" system.
- o Anyone using kayak or canoe must be trained and experienced.
- o Do not try to access areas that are difficult.
- o Be cautious of caves and tidal areas.

#### **Coastal Clean-ups:**

- o When working on the coast, never conduct clean-ups with your back to the water.
- o Watch the tide. In some areas, the tide may come in and cut you from the shore.
- o Do not enter the water to collect rubbish as there could be dangerous currents.
- o Ensure that non-swimmers and children keep away from the water's edge.
- o Avoid climbing boulders or rocks as they may be slippery and loose under foot.
- o Avoid working alongside steep or overhanging cliffs as they may be unstable due to erosion.



# Making a difference in 2 minutes

## 3.4 Do a #2MinuteBeachClean

If you love water sports, the sea and our beautiful coast are your playground. Are you enjoying the time you spend here? Then take two minutes to make a difference – do a #2MinuteBeachClean.







## How to take part in the #2minutebeachclean?

- Follow Clean Coasts – @CleanCoasts on Instagram/ Twitter/Facebook/TikTok
- Do a #2minutebeachclean
- Take a snap of the marine litter you collect
- Post your snap on social media using the hashtag #2MinuteBeachClean and tagging @CleanCoasts so we can reshare them
- Dispose of the waste you collected properly, recycle it/bin it!
- Be safe when you do your #2minutebeachclean

## Why should you do a #2minutebeachclean

People may think 2 minutes is a very short time to make a difference, but small actions add up to make a big difference. Every piece of plastic removed from the marine environment is no longer a danger to our marine life and environment.

Each #2MinuteBeachClean is estimated to weigh in at 1-2KG. If everybody in Ireland does a #2MinuteBeachClean per month for a year, that's over 100,000 tonnes of litter removed from our ocean.

- It will have an immediate positive impact on our environment
- You will be an example and inspire other people to take action too
- You will contribute to creating a more sustainable community
- It's an easy way to be active and exercise
- A cleaner environment means better health
- Spending time by the sea and outdoors is good for the body and for the mind
- You will help protect the ocean and marine life
- You will also help protect all life on land



## SECTION 4

# THINK BEFORE YOU FLUSH AND THINK BEFORE YOU POUR

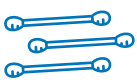
When spending the day on the beach, there's one more way you can protect our coast: when you are using public restrooms!

### Think Before You Flush

The Think Before You Flush campaign, which is operated by Clean Coasts in partnership with Uisce Éireann, highlights the issue of flushing unsuitable items down the toilet and the consequences of doing so, such as blockages in our wastewater network and treatment plants; surface water overflows; and sewage related litter in our rivers, on our beaches and in our oceans, damaging our marine environment.

According to a recent survey carried out by Uisce Éireann, one in five admit to flushing particularly damaging items down the toilet.

### THE DIRTY DOZEN



Cotton Buds



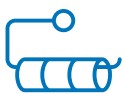
Baby Wipes



Facial Wipes



Cleansing Pads



Toilet Roll Tube



Medicines



Cigarettes



Plasters



Nappies



Tampons



Tampon Applicator



Sanitary Pads

### Think Before You Pour

Did you know you can also “Enjoy and Protect” our coast this summer while you are preparing all you need for your outdoor picnic or after spending a day outdoors? You can do so from your kitchen.

In addition to Clean Coasts and Uisce Éireann's Think Before You Flush campaign, you can Enjoy and Protect our environment this summer season by supporting our Think Before You Pour campaign. Fats, oils and greases may seem like liquid when poured, but they cool and harden as they travel along the pipes and can cause blockages in our homes, businesses, the public sewer network and wastewater treatment plants. They can even lead to overflows of sewage in our communities and pollution in rivers, on beaches and in the ocean.

When FOGs combine with wipes and other sewage related litter such as hair and dental floss that shouldn't be flushed down the toilet, fatbergs can form. Irish Water clears hundreds of blockages including fatbergs from the wastewater network every week.

#thinkb4upour and bin those FOGs instead of disposing them down the kitchen sink. By doing so, you will make a tangible difference for Ireland's natural environment this summer.





**FIND US & TAG US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:**

Facebook: @CleanCoasts

Twitter: @CleanCoasts

Instagram: @cleancoasts

YouTube: Clean Coasts Ireland

Linkedin: Clean Coasts

#CleanCoasts #2MinuteBeachClean

[www.cleancoasts.org](http://www.cleancoasts.org)