

LOVE YOUR COAST Photography Competition Guidelines for 2026



Photo: Anna Keallagher Cloaked Hermit Crab Knightstown, Kerry.

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About this Guide

The following guide was created in conjunction with Clean Coasts, BirdWatch Ireland, Seal Rescue Ireland (SRI) and the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) and aims to equip photographers with the correct information on how to capture the beauty of wildlife responsibly without causing any harm. If you make a submission to the Love Your Coast Photography competition the guidelines outlined within this document must be followed. If the judging panel feels that entries have failed to comply with the following guidelines they will automatically be disqualified from the competition.



About Clean Coasts

Clean Coasts is a charity programme, run through the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce.

Clean Coasts works with communities nationwide to help protect and care for Ireland's waterways, coastline, seas, ocean, and marine life. The programme strives to create tangible and immediate improvements to Ireland's coastal environment, involving thousands of volunteers removing large quantities of marine litter from our coastline each year.

The Clean Coasts programme has grown over the years and now includes over 2,000 registered Clean Coasts volunteering groups. There are a variety of group types such as community groups, residents' associations, tidy towns groups, sports clubs, schools, businesses, universities and more.

Clean Coasts and our regional groups organise hundreds of beach clean-ups annually mobilising thousands of volunteers, removing considerable quantities of marine litter from Ireland's beaches and waterways.



PHOTOGRAPHY
COMPETITION



Photo: Kevin Doyle Golden Surge Tramore Waterford

About the Love Your Coast Photography Competition

Launching in 2026 to coincide with Valentine's Day, The Clean Coasts' Love Your Coast Competition encourages photographers to fall in love with Ireland's coastal environment, while focusing on the theme of **Impact**.

From sweeping coastal landscapes and winding waterways to intimate encounters with wildlife and human activities, the theme invites reflection on both the positive and negative ways our oceans, waterways, and shorelines are shaped by human activities and natural forces - and how these environments, in turn, can impact our lives, wellbeing, and communities.

With a prize fund of €5,000, Love Your Coast offers photographers the opportunity to showcase their talent across five distinct categories highlighting the unique aspects of the Irish coast.

Love Your Coast has been attracting thousands of photographers from across the country each year, but its mission extends beyond a photography competition.

Our coastal environment and marine life form an integral part of our island's cultural identity. Through this competition, we invite you to appreciate, celebrate, and safeguard our coast through your lens.

Competition Terms & Conditions

Please carefully read the following terms and conditions of the competition to ensure you are eligible to apply. If we feel that entries have failed to comply, they will be automatically be disqualified.

- Photographs or images that have won other competitions are not eligible.
- All photographs and images submitted must have been taken within the Republic of Ireland in the last 24 months (2 years).
- The competition is open to **amateur photographers only** and not open to professionals. This means that photography is your hobby, not one of your core sources of income - no more than 20% of your total income can come from photography sources. This clause is self policed, please respect the ethos and integrity of the competition.
- No digitally altered images will be accepted. (No cloning, adding or removing elements). Basic post-processing adjustments are permitted (e.g. brightness, contrast, sharpening)
- The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) at any stage of the creation, editing, or alteration of photographs or their subjects (outside of basic spot removal) is strictly prohibited. Where AI use is suspected, entries will be reviewed by a panel of experts to determine whether AI has been used. Any entry found to involve AI will be disqualified.
- In the submission form, the photographer must include technical information and settings used to capture their photo (e.g. camera, lens, exposure, speed, ISO, any specialist equipment etc).
- When uploading the photo, it must be titled in the following format.
 - Photographer Name_Title of Photograph_Location of Photograph.jpg
 - Example: Joe Bloggs_Sunset at the Forty Foot_Dun Laoghaire Co Dublin.jpg

Competition Terms & Conditions

Please carefully read the following terms and conditions of the competition to ensure you are eligible to apply. If we feel that entries have failed to comply, they will be automatically be disqualified.

- Entrants must comply with national legislation as regards the photographing of protected wild animals or birds (see Wildlife Act, 1976). Please review the relevant section of this legislation on the National Parks and Wildlife website.
- If you intend to photograph a protected wild animal on or near the breeding place of such an animal, a license is required. This will be strictly enforced, and shortlisted images will be asked to present their license for images that fall under these criteria.
- Entrants must not interfere with or damage the breeding place of any wild animal or bird (see Wildlife Act, 1976). Again, please review the National Parks and Wildlife website. Please also carefully read and abide by the Guidelines for Photographing Birds and Wildlife and the Code of Conduct, both which are detailed in this document.
- Entrants confirm they are the sole author of the work and it is their original entry. They own the copyright and all other intellectual property rights to each image. They have the permission of anyone featured in the image (or in the case of under 18s, the consent of the parent or primary guardian).
- If the organisers suspect that an image has been achieved through the use of cruel or unethical practices, including the use of live bait, the entry will be disqualified and the organisers reserve the right to report the entrant to the applicable authorities.
- Entrants confirm they are the sole author of the work and it is their original entry. They own the copyright and all other intellectual property rights to each image. They have the permission of anyone featured in the image (or in the case of under 18s, the consent of the parent or primary guardian).
- The maximum number of entries per person is 5.
- The organisers reserve the right to remove entrants that breach or contravene laws of public decency or may bring the entrant and/or competition into disrepute.

Competition Terms & Conditions

Please carefully read the following terms and conditions of the competition to ensure you are eligible to apply. If we feel that entries have failed to comply, they will be automatically be disqualified.

- Entries must be submitted digitally through the official online submission portal. Submissions sent through email will not be accepted. Please visit <https://cleancoasts.org/our-initiatives/love-your-coast/> to access the submission link and upload your entries.
- Initial digital submissions should be jpegs less than 5MB in file size. If shortlisted, entrants will then be asked for a higher resolution of their entry at a later date.
- Disguising or misrepresenting the origin of the photograph will constitute a breach of the rules.
- Copyright remains with the entrant but grants permission for the images to be used by An Taisce's Clean Coasts programme for press and promotion. This may include but is not limited to:
 - Display of images on Clean Coasts website, social media, brochures, publications relating to the competition, the organiser's website or websites connected to the competition and work of An Taisce.
 - An Taisce reserves the right for the use of these images for itself and key stakeholders in the promotion of Irelands coastline, with photographers accreditation visible.
 - Images may also be used by sponsors of the Love Your Coast photography competition, including Fáilte Ireland and the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment for press, promotion and departmental publications, with photographers accreditation visible.
- The above information is correct although the organisers reserve the right to change any of the above without prior notice. Any breach by the entrant of the above terms and conditions will render their entry invalid. If a breach has occurred but is discovered after the award of a prize then the organisers may request the return of the prize.
- The closing date for entries is **midnight on Friday the 15th of May 2026**. Any entries received outside this timeframe will not be considered.

Guidelines for Photographing Birds & Wildlife



People may not be aware that it is illegal to disturb and/or photograph nesting birds unless a specific license has been granted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Under Section 22 (9)(f) of the Wildlife Act, 1976 (as amended), a licence is required for a person to take video or pictures of a wild bird “on or near a nest containing eggs or unflown young.”

This licence does not confer on you the right to disturb the birds in the process. For further information on how to acquire a licence go to the National Parks and Wildlife Services website.

Code of Conduct

To help minimise the risk of disturbance for breeding birds the Irish Wildlife Trust (IWT) and Birdwatch Ireland have developed the following code of conduct to be adhered to. Please read it, and follow it, if you're heading out to an Irish seabird colony this breeding season.

- The Wildlife Act of 1976, as amended in 2000, (section 22 and others) **prohibits the disturbance** of wild birds, their nests, and their eggs.
- Visitors must therefore maintain an **appropriate distance** from any bird and birds **should not be approached**, even if they seem tame.
- Birds that are sitting on nests **should not be approached**.
- Nests and eggs should **not be touched or handled in any way**. Getting near a nest can result in people being dive-bombed by protective gulls, something that can result in injury to the observer.
- Young birds should **not be approached**. Parent birds frequently leave their fledgelings while foraging for food and so young birds are highly unlikely to have been abandoned.
- **Do not feed birds** or leave food where it can be reached.
- It is an **offence to walk among nests**, e.g. at Gannet colonies, or to seek close up shots without a zoom lens.
- Children should be **supervised at all times**.
- Please don't litter and follow the '**Leave no Trace**' campaign guidance.

If we feel that entries have failed to comply with the above, they will be automatically be disqualified.

Guidelines for Photographing & Watching Marine Mammals



Photo: Tom Ormond Humpback Whale Mullaghmore, Sligo

Government regulations **prohibit the disturbance of all cetaceans** (whales, dolphins and porpoises) in Irish waters.

Cetacean behaviour may be unpredictable and cause potential damage to small craft, especially when large whales are feeding and/or when young calves are present.

The basic **Code of Conduct** outlined above should also be followed when encountering cetaceans.



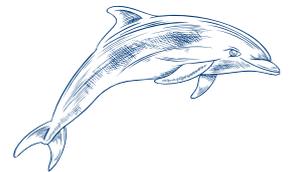
'Ocean's Dance' by Nicolas Malterre



Watching/Photographing Cetaceans on the Water

- When whales or dolphins are first encountered, the craft should maintain a steady course.
- Boat speed should be maintained below 7 knots.
- Maintain > 100m distance from any cetacean.
- Maintain a 200m distance from any other craft in the area.
- Attempt to steer a course parallel to the direction whales or dolphins are taking.
- Do not corral whales or dolphins between boats.
- Successive boats must follow the same course.
- Special care must be taken when young calves are seen. Never come between a mother and her calf.
- You should not spend more than 30 minutes with whales or dolphins.
- Do not attempt to swim with them.
- Dolphins often approach boats to 'bow ride'. If this happens, maintain your speed and course. Do not make any sudden course or speed changes.

Watching/Photographing Cetaceans from Land



You don't necessarily have to go out on the water to have great sightings of whales, dolphins and porpoises in Ireland. A headland in good weather (with light winds and calm seas) can work just as well, especially when you have a pair of good binoculars or a spotting scope to hand.

You should scan the sea using your binoculars or spotting scope, to reveal signs that may indicate the presence of animals, such as, feeding seabirds, splashes or a whale's blow shooting up from the sea.

Land-based whale watching is really about patience, the more time you put in, the more likely you will be rewarded with a special sighting of common or rare species which contributes to our understanding of these animals.

Remember you can report your sightings to the IWDG.

Guidelines for Photographing & Watching Seals (Pinnipeds)



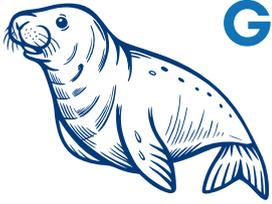
Photo: Brian Casey Want to play Dalkey, Dublin

Seals need to come ashore to rest, however, they are more vulnerable on land. Therefore, when watching seals from land guidelines should be followed as seals can be easily disturbed resulting indirect (injury) and indirect (displacement) disturbance.

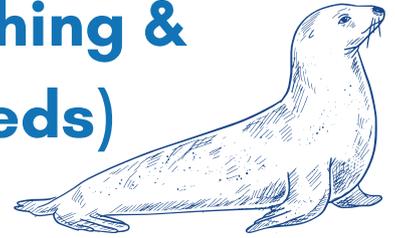
There are two seal species native to Ireland, the Common Seal (born June-August) and the Grey Seal (born August-February). While it is an exciting experience to spot a seal, it's important to respect them from a safe distance, **particularly during their pupping seasons.**

Seals must come up on land to rest and rear their pups, and this is when they are extremely sensitive to disturbances by humans or dogs, which can result in their being abandoned by their mother, thereby jeopardising their survival.





Guidelines for Photographing & Watching Seals (Pinnipeds)



- Seals should be viewed **from a distance**. Stay at least 100 m away and limit your viewing time to 15 minutes.
- **Never approach, touch or disturb a seal**, as it can cause harm or injury to them. Seals are protected under both Irish and EU law. Remember to observe quietly from a safe distance (at least 100m), keep a low profile, keep children away, and keep dogs on a lead at all times.
- Use your **zoom lens**; you can still get some great shots while not taking away from a seal's crucial resting periods.
- If the seal is looking at you, this is considered a disturbance and you are probably too close.
- **Dogs should be kept on leads** to prevent disturbance, especially during pupping or moulting season.
- When taking photographs use a zoom lens camera and stay out of sight and use binoculars to gain a good view.
- Be aware of behavioural and stress responses.
- Be aware of your position. **Do not impede a seal's access to the sea**.
- Be aware that noise levels disturb seals.
- **Do not feed** any seals.
- **Never put a seal in the water**; injured, sick or new-born pups are on land for a reason. A seal pup alone on the beach is not necessarily abandoned; mothers can sometimes leave them for hours at a time but will return to care for them.
- **DO NOT touch a seal** or try taking selfies near one. Seals have sharp teeth and a nasty infection known as seal finger, which requires immediate medical assistance.
- If you see an ID tag on the rear flipper of a seal (either dead or alive) please take photos and send them to SRI, as this data is invaluable.
- If you think a seal may need help please contact Seal Rescue Ireland's 24/7 Rescue Hotline at 087 1955 393.
- Take photos using the zoom function on your camera and send them through to help SRI quickly determine the seal's condition, and if necessary, a rescue can be organised promptly.
- It is best practice to not post or share photos of seals looking directly at the camera, as this is a sign that the seal's natural behaviours have been interrupted.



Competition Categories

'Barrel Jellyfish' by Gordon Leonard



2026 Competition Categories



This year, we've picked out five categories for photographers to submit their work to, focusing on the theme of **Impact**. Ensure your image is placed in the appropriate category to maximise your chances of success.

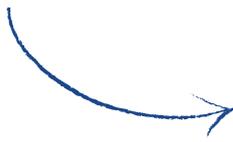
Adrian Fingleton Milky Way Brittas Bay, Wicklow



1.) Coastal Landscape



2.) Source to Sea



Lorraine Schilder Sunrise On The Boyne Slane Meath



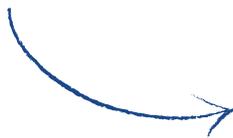
3.) Wildlife and the Coast



Des Glynn Rock Pipet Great Saltee Co Wexford.



4.) People and the Coast



Dave Stanley What a wonderful world Bettystown, Meath



5.) Underwater



Mark O Leary The Giants Co Clare.





Coastal Landscape

Photo: Noel O Neil Minard Castle and Snow Capped Reeks Lispole, Kerry.

photo: Michael Linehan Twin Lights Dublin Bay.



Coastal Landscape

Ireland's coastline is a place of breathtaking beauty and constant transformation. From towering cliffs and wild Atlantic waves to tranquil sandy coves and ever-shifting dunes, our shores tell a story of both resilience and change.

Spanning 486 kilometres, our coastline is shaped by the powerful forces of nature - the roaring Atlantic on the West and the dynamic Irish Sea on the East. But alongside this natural splendour, our shores are also on the frontline of the impacts of climate change. Rising sea levels, erosion, pollution and extreme weather events are reshaping the landscapes we cherish, while coastal communities and ecosystems adapt in remarkable ways.

This category invites you to capture the Irish coast in all its moods - its raw beauty, its fragile moments, and its ongoing evolution. Whether it's the dramatic cliffs of Malin Head, the windswept beaches of Wexford, or the resilience of salt marshes and dunes rebuilding after storms, every image should reflect the story of a coastline shaped and impacted by both nature and time.

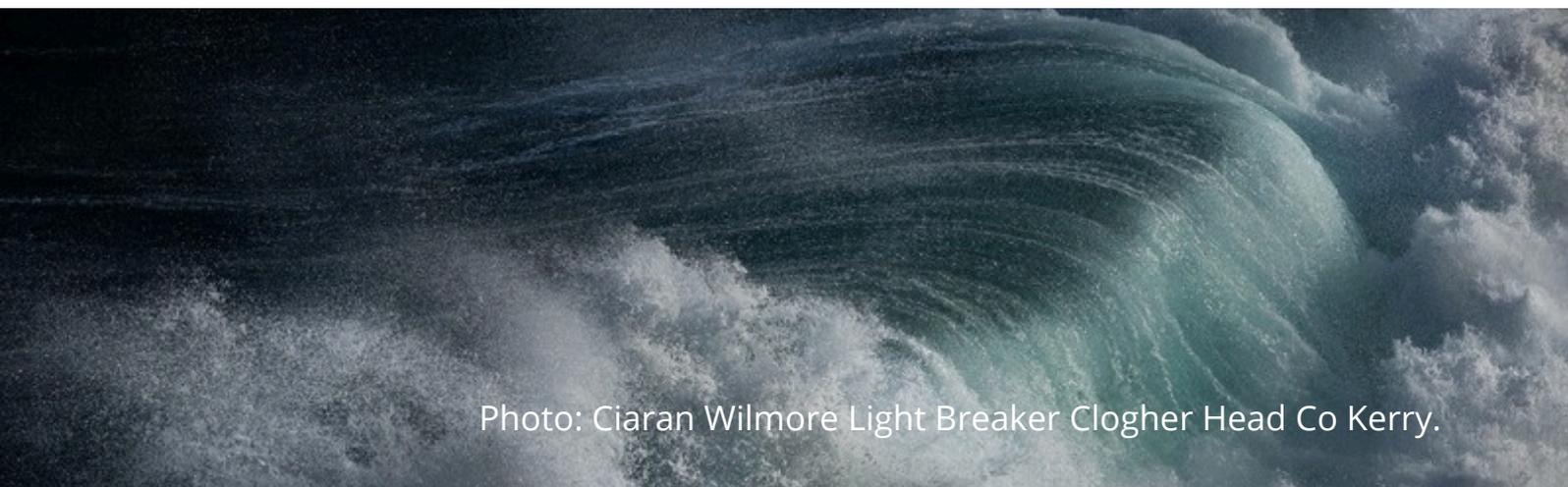


Photo: Ciaran Wilmore Light Breaker Clogher Head Co Kerry.



Source to Sea

Photo: Helen Black Let there be Light Glendasan Wicklow.



Photo: Felix Sproll Rainbow Island Derryclare Lough, Connemara.

Source to Sea

Every drop of water has a journey. From mountain streams and winding rivers to urban canals and vast estuaries, all waterways are connected, ultimately flowing to the coast where they can shape and impact coastal environments and the communities that depend on them.

This category explores the intricate network of catchments, rivers, lakes, and wetlands that carve our landscapes and feed the sea. Capture water in all its forms: rushing rivers, tranquil lakes, tidal estuaries, urban canals, or even raindrops just beginning their path to the ocean.

Whether highlighting the beauty of these waterways, the life they sustain along their path, the various ways in which humans can impact them, or in turn, how these waterways can impact our communities, this category reminds us that every waterway is part of a greater journey - one that always leads to the sea.

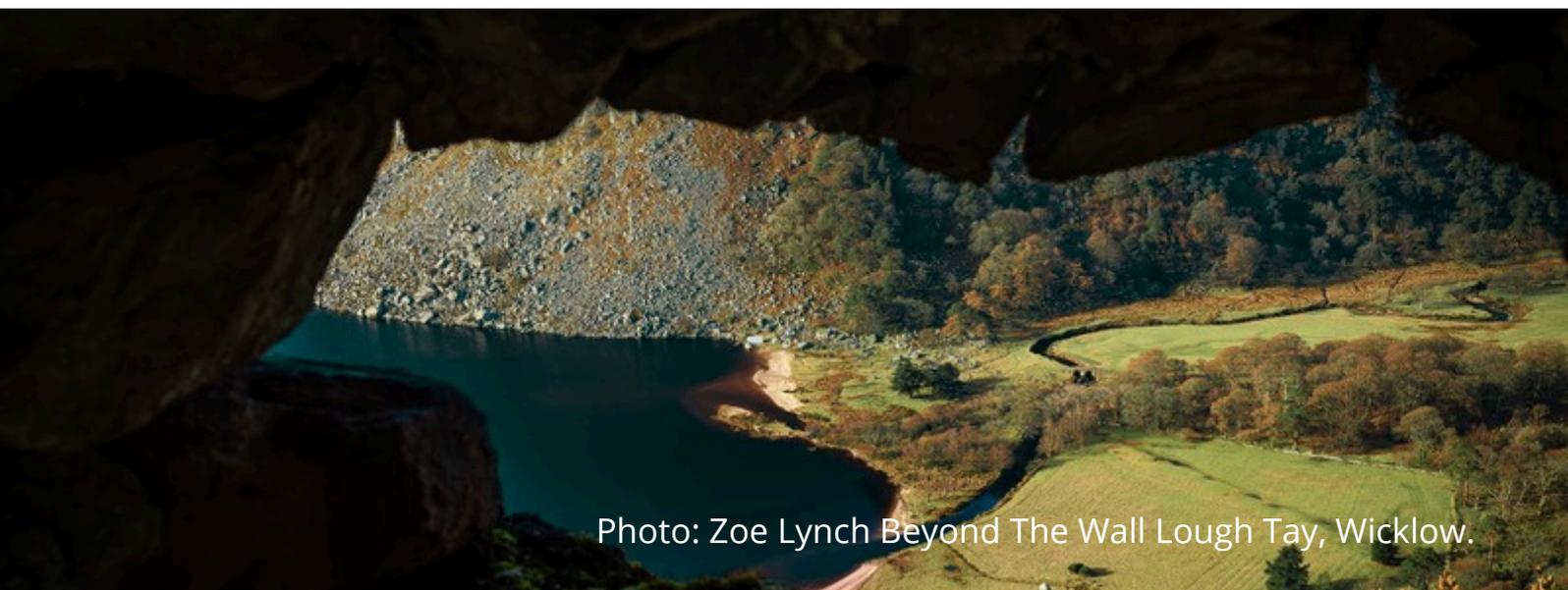


Photo: Zoe Lynch Beyond The Wall Lough Tay, Wicklow.



Wildlife and the Coast

Photo: Christopher Martin Grey Seal Meal



Wildlife and the Coast

This is your opportunity to reveal the remarkable wildlife that calls our island home. Though small in size, Ireland supports an extraordinary richness of life, with over 4,000 plant species, more than 450 recorded bird species (resident, migrant, and vagrant), and more than 50 terrestrial and marine mammal species.

Along our picturesque coastlines, we share the seas with a wealth of marine life. From majestic whales and playful dolphins to graceful seabirds and elusive sharks. Inland, estuaries, rivers, lakes, hedgerows, and towpaths host intricate ecosystems where plants, insects, birds, and fish coexist harmoniously, each playing a vital role in our country's delicate habitats along our waterways.

This category is an opportunity to responsibly and respectfully capture not only the beauty of these species but also highlight the pressures they face from human impacts, pollution, and climate change, to showcase the resilience, wonder and the importance of safeguarding Ireland's wildlife and portray a shared message – that we are not apart from nature, we are a part of nature.



A photograph of a person swimming in the ocean at sunset. The person is seen from the back, with their head and shoulders above water. The water is dark with shimmering highlights from the low sun. The overall mood is serene and peaceful.

People and the Coast

Photo: Maria Quigley Embrace The Water Coliemore Harbour Co. Dublin



Photo: Mark Simpson Evening Walk Sandymount Strand, Dublin.

People and the Coast

The coast is more than a backdrop - it is a place of powerful impact, shaping how we live, feel, and connect. For generations, people have been drawn to the shoreline for work, leisure, and tradition, building communities and cultures around the rhythm of the tides.

This category explores the many ways in which people interact with the coast, and the lasting impacts of those interactions. Human activities can negatively impact fragile shorelines through pollution, overuse of resources, and placing pressure on coastal habitats, while they can also positively impact our coastlines through conservation efforts, clean-ups, and stewardship driven by care and connection.

Our coastal environment can also impact us - with time spent by the sea positively lifting our mood, supporting our wellbeing, and offering a space for movement, reflection, and renewal, while rising sea levels and increasingly severe storms linked to climate change are having negative impacts on coastal communities around our shores.

Whether capturing surfers catching waves at sunrise or fishermen casting their nets, beachgoers taking a quiet moment to reflect by the water or communities in action working to protect their coastline, this category invites you to document the powerful relationship between people and our coasts - and the impact we have on them, just as they have on us.



Photo: Sean Berry Kick About at the Beach Gyles Quay, Louth



Underwater

Photo: Eabha Hughes In Plain Sight Kilkee Co.Clare.



Photo: John Bennett Camouflage and Calm Nature's Illusionist Cape Clear Cork.

Underwater

This category invites photographers to explore the wonders of wildlife and biodiversity through a different lens, one beneath the surface. Largely unseen and experienced by only a few, the underwater realm is a vibrant, fragile world that can leave a lasting impact and impression on those who encounter it.

Ireland is home to a remarkably rich marine ecosystem, with 26 cetacean species (whale, dolphin, and porpoise), over 580 marine fish species, 39 species of sharks, and more than 500 types of marine plants and seaweeds. This category encourages photographers to reveal the hidden beauty of our oceans and the splendour of our underwater world, while encouraging a deeper reflection on the growing impacts facing marine life, from human activity, plastic seas, and a changing climate.

From the dramatic kelp forests and biodiversity networks on the seabed, to mysterious rockpools and the grace of the basking shark, we want to immerse ourselves in the full spectrum of underwater marvels through your lens - the beauty, diversity, and impact it has, and the need to protect it.



Photo: Stephen Frawley Dancing in the Light Sandycove, Dublin.

Photo: Shauna Ward Yolanda in the sea Mullaghmore, Sligo.

Good Luck!

In closing, we hope that this guide has given you all the information you need to make a successful submission to the 2026 Love Your Coast Photography Competition!

All submissions can be made via our website. [Click here](#) to submit your image now.

Please make sure the correct procedures are undertaken when you are out capturing the beauty of Ireland's nature and wildlife. When we photograph wildlife in the correct way we are ensuring that it is protected into the future. What we love we capture in photography and it is critical that we conserve it.

If you have any further questions you can reach out to us via our email at loveyourcoast@eeu.antaisce.org

