

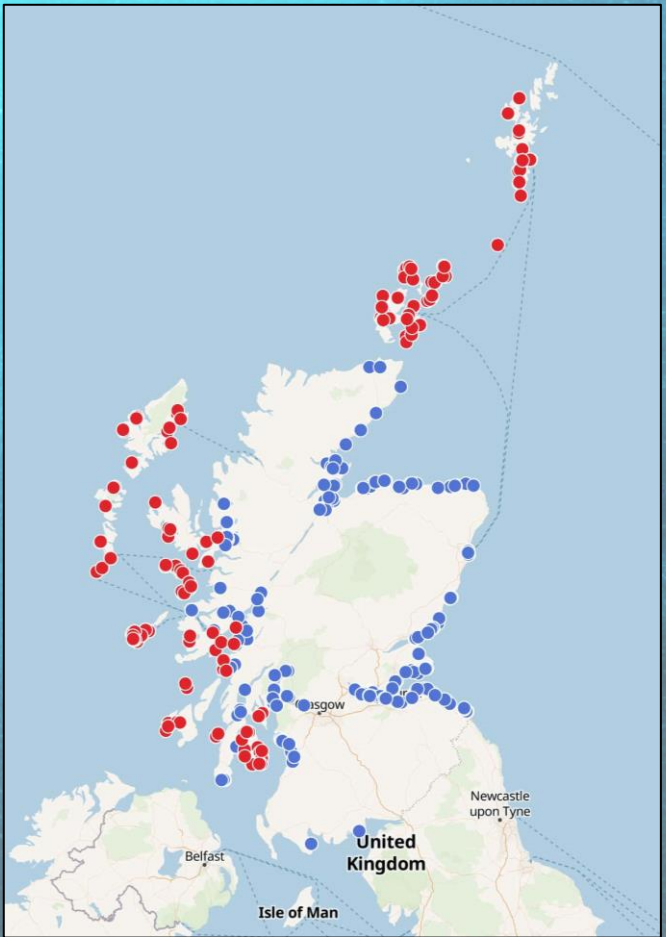
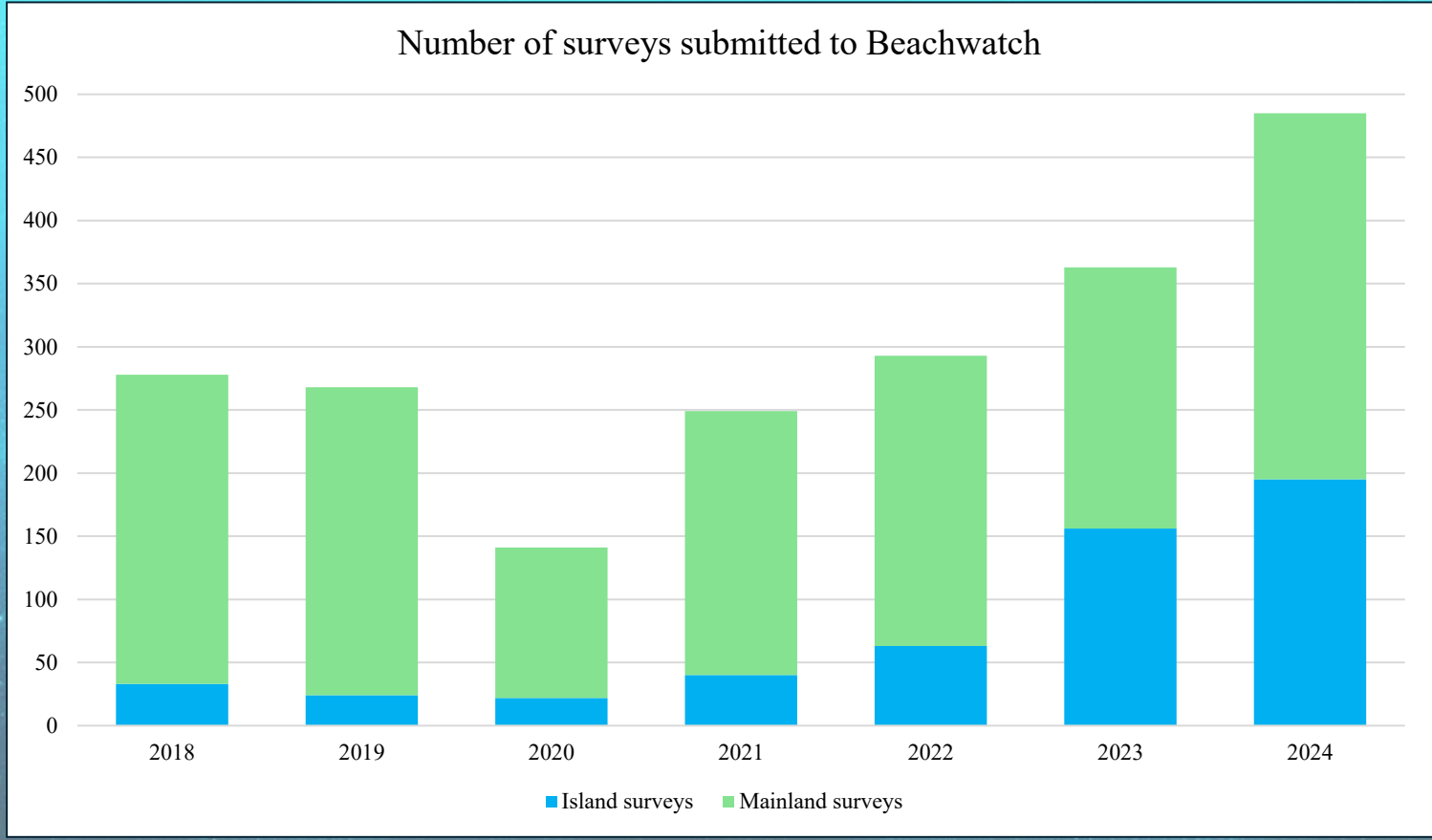


Vicki Last

**Marine Litter
Development Officer
(West coast)**



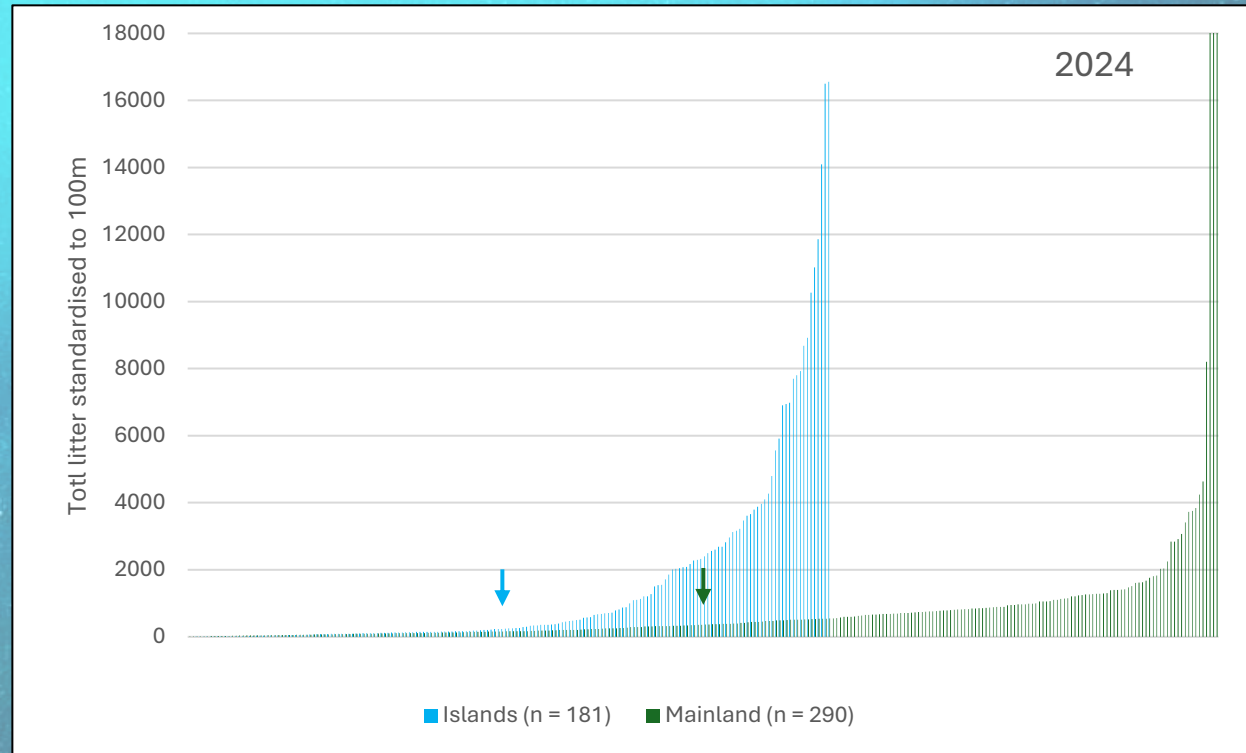
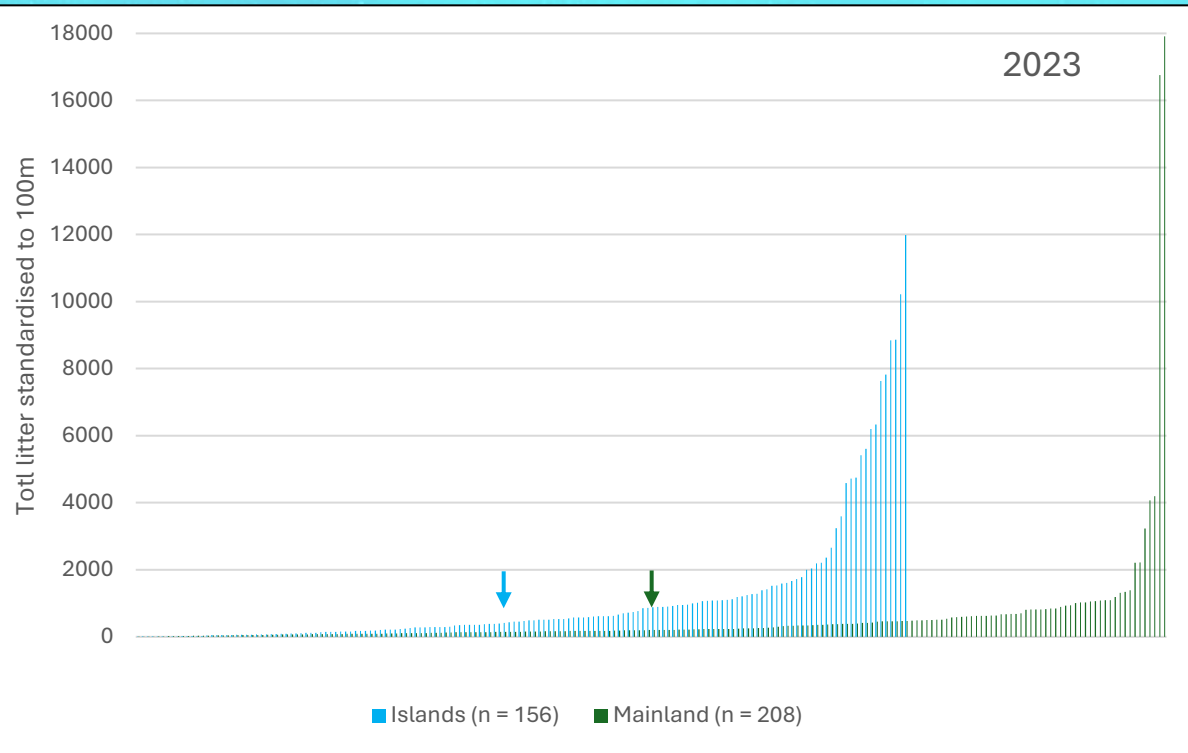
Photo © Catriona Spink, Ocean G



Red – island surveys
Blue – mainland surveys

Our main success is a massive increase in the number of beach litter surveys submitted to the Marine Conservation Society's Beachwatch programme from across the Scottish islands. This has improved understanding of Scottish island beach litter - a key objective of the Scottish Marine Litter Strategy.

Total litter count standardised to 100m stretch



A plot of the total litter count for each survey, standardised to 100m survey stretch, indicates a difference in distribution between island and mainland surveys with more island surveys returning high litter loadings (>2000 items/100m) than the mainland. Litter sinks in Arrochar, and east loch Tarbert are exceptions to this (with loadings off the scale in 2024). Arrows indicate the median loading.



Examples of
high litter
loadings on
island beaches.



© Scottish Islands Federation

Skye



© Scottish Islands Federation

Mull



Examples of
high litter
loadings on
island beaches.

Lewis

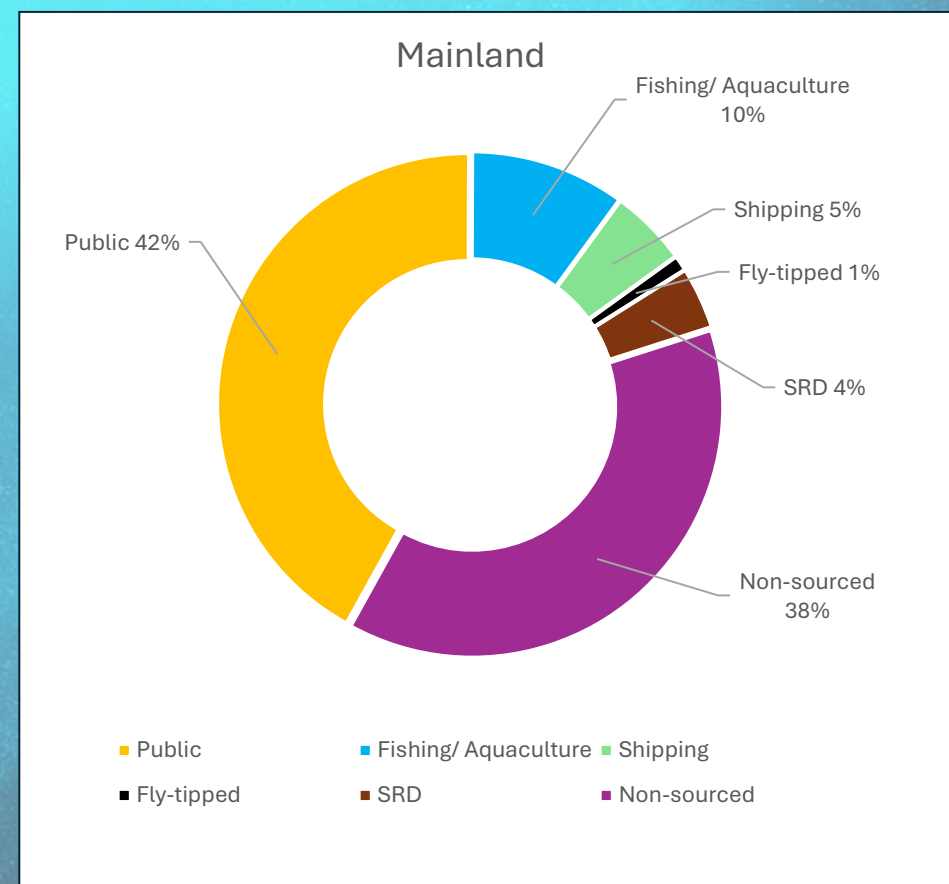
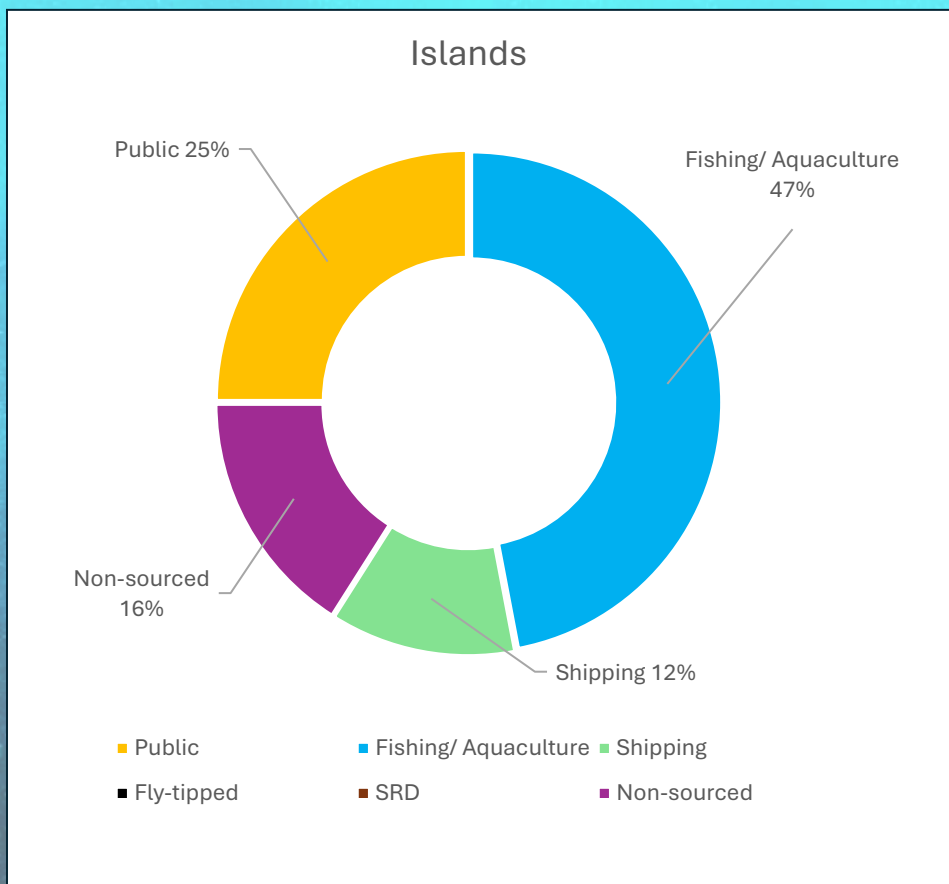


© Janet Marshall, Clean Coast Outer Hebrides

© Catriona Spink, Ocean Gives

Tiree





Credit: Marine Conservation Society

Island beach litter is typically dominated by litter sourced from marine industries - fishing, aquaculture and shipping, whilst mainland beach litter is dominated by public-sourced litter.



Typical litter sourced from marine industry: fishing net, net cuttings, rope, cord, bait pot etc



Public sourced/unsourced items including many single-use plastics (eg bottle tops, plastic bottles, food containers, shotgun cartridges).

However, several items do not fall into any of the specific OSPAR litter categories and so were classed as 'plastic-other' and hence 'unsourced' although the source industry is known. Recent revisions mean such items can now be classified as 'other plastic fisheries related item' to improve source categorisation, but this does not allow further description of the item in the Beachwatch database.



SIF has modified its recording form by introducing several sub-categories to enhance data clarity and understanding, while acknowledging that this may risk adding complexity to an already detailed tool used by volunteer surveyors.



Current beach litter monitoring does not adequately record particularly large items which, whilst relatively rare, are exceptionally difficult for local communities to remove and dispose of.





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© Greener Orkney



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If not removed promptly, such items can break apart and shed polystyrene fragments across the beach which are also very difficult to remove.



© Ben Jones, RSPB



© Skye Beach Cleans



© Scottish Islands Federation

Cleaning remote beaches presents significant logistical challenges, particularly when it comes to removing collected marine litter from difficult-to-access locations. The onward transport and disposal of this material from islands to centralised waste facilities on the mainland further compounds the difficulty. These efforts are often led by third sector organisations and local authorities, who must shoulder the financial burden with limited resources. The entire process remains heavily reliant on volunteer support and goodwill, highlighting the need for more sustainable, long-term solutions.



© Ocean Recovery Project

Despite the many challenges, we are now in the third year of our collaboration with the Ocean Recovery Project to uplift beach litter from the shorelines of Skye and the Small Isles and send appropriate material for recycling.



© Ocean Recovery Project



This year, with the help of Scottish Coastal Clean Up, the Eigg Environmental Action Group, Skye Beach Cleans and many others a selection of rope was given to Shore to Floor for repurposing (a member of our growing network of creatives and makers working with marine litter), and fish boxes were given to Ocean Plastic Pots for recycling plant pots and kitchenware.



Rigid plastics were given to MYGroup
for recycling into boards.





Our pilot has demonstrated that marine litter collected from Scottish islands can be successfully recycled, proving the potential for more sustainable waste management solutions. However, current operations lack the economies of scale required to make such recycling efforts economically viable. To ensure long-term success, greater volume, coordination, and investment are needed to reduce costs and support a more efficient recycling infrastructure.

And fishing net was given to Milspeed for recycling into plastic pellets as a feed stock for a variety of purposes.

