

# **Marine Scotland Directorate**

## **Attitudes in Scotland on the Marine Environment and Marine Issues**

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**Scottish Government**  
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Marine Scotland commissioned YouGov to carry out a Marine Social Attitudes Survey to collect and analyse data on the attitudes and behaviours of Scottish residents on the marine environment, including; uses of marine and coastal areas, environmental concerns, marine economic activities, and the management of Scotland's marine environment.

## **Research Approach**

The survey aimed to provide evidence on the Scottish public's perceptions, values and behaviours on topical marine issues. Data was collected using an online questionnaire administered to a representative sample of Scottish residents and focus group discussions with members of the public comprising of three different demographic groups- pre-family (18-30, no children), family (30-60, children under 16 living at home), and empty nesters (50+, no children / children left home). The evidence collected provides an assessment of public interest and support on various areas, and it will aid in policy development and inform how we can best engage with the Scottish public. It delivers evidence for a number of priority areas in Marine Scotland, including; the National Marine Plan; marine protected areas, marine litter, marine industries and management of the marine environment.

## **Survey Findings**

### ***Marine leisure activities***

There is a high level of engagement with the marine environment among residents in Scotland. The vast majority (89%) of the Scottish public surveyed have visited the Scottish sea or coast in the past year. Typical activities are wide ranging and vary across the population. Group and water-based activities are more likely to be done by younger respondents whilst walking, wildlife watching and beachcombing are more likely to be done by older respondents. For carers with children, the seaside offers a 'cheap day out' although good facilities are a key determinant of where the public saw opportunities.

Those who live near the coast recognise they are 'fortunate' to have easier access to the marine environment for leisure and recreation, seeing it as a valuable and low-cost resource in terms of spending time outdoors, keeping fit, looking after mental wellbeing, and entertaining children/young people.

Although those participating in the focus group discussions say they enjoy using the marine environment for leisure, many comment that they would like to see better facilities available to encourage further use. Many, especially families, note a lack of clean, working toilet facilities and availability of drinking water, while a lack of well-maintained walkways in coastal areas can mean access for people with buggies or in wheelchairs is limited. Cheap parking, close by to coastal areas, is also raised by participants as an influential factor in deciding which areas to visit and make use of.

### ***Knowledge about the marine environment***

Recent nature documentaries (such as Blue Planet) have helped to increase understanding of the marine environment. Nearly half (48%) of Scottish residents say they have learned about the Scottish Marine environment from films or nature/wildlife documentaries. There is however strong appetite to learn more about the marine environment. About 73% of respondents indicated that they would like to learn more, including on the impact of Brexit (35% of respondents) and climate change (27% of respondents) on the marine environment, and about marine industries such as renewable energy (25%).

Generally, knowledge about marine economic sectors is low among Scottish residents. Three in ten (31%) Scottish residents say they know about renewable energy (such as wind, waves and tide) very well or a fair amount, followed by non-renewable energy, such as oil and gas (29%) and coastal tourism, recreation, cruises (25%). Although discussions with groups comprising members of the public suggested that they did not have much knowledge about marine economic sectors, when probed many spoke knowledgably about the current use of wind farms in Scotland, the possibility of increasing reliance on tidal energy, and the benefits and drawbacks of this. Survey respondents felt least informed about use of the marine environment for military exercises, such as those by the Royal Navy. Only one in nine said they know this area very well or a fair amount.

### ***Economic and social values of the marine environment***

The tangible and intangible benefits of Scotland's coast and seas are clearly recognised by Scottish residents. Discussions with groups comprising members of the public highlighted benefits to mental and physical health, and entertainment for the younger population. Respondents highlighted the social value of ports and harbours as well as coastal tourism (including cruises) and recreation, as well as the economic value and benefits provided by marine industries through employment and spending in local economies.

Men are more likely than women to say that commercial sea fishing, construction, ship building and non-renewable energy such as oil and gas are important socially. In terms of economic value, coastal tourism / recreation / cruises is also perceived to be important to Scotland, alongside transportation of goods / commercial shipping (both 82%) and ports and harbours (81%), while only 40% of respondents saw military exercises as having economic importance to Scotland.

A small proportion of Scottish residents have a direct economic relationship with the marine environment. Only 12% of respondents had visited the coast in the past year for work or business reasons. Rural respondents were more likely to have visited for this purpose than urban respondents (17% vs 10%), suggesting a greater reliance on the marine environment for economic activity in rural communities.

Discussions with the public showed mixed views about the trade-off between economic and social benefits from the marine environment and environmental protection. Some participants in group discussions with members of the public felt that employment and economic contributions such as GVA ought to be higher (especially for well-known industries such as aquaculture, commercial sea fishing and the oil and gas industry) to justify the damage being done to the marine environment. Others felt, however, that current levels of economic and social benefits to society were sufficient to justify some impact on the marine environment.

Overall, discussions with groups comprising members of the public suggested a strong support for sustainable use and management of marine environment. They interpreted this to mean maximising the benefit of the marine environment to Scottish residents whilst protecting resources for future generations. The key considerations when assessing economic and social benefits from the marine environment employment for local people and ensuring that income generated was invested back into the Scottish economy

### ***Environmental Concerns***

Scottish residents are concerned that not enough is being done to protect the environment, with nearly a third of residents believing that the health of Scotland's seas has worsened in the last year. Amidst current marine environmental issues, marine litter dominate concerns about the marine environment; led by plastic bottles (67%), bags (60%) and micro plastics (49%). These were seen as having a direct impact on families living near and visiting the coast. A quarter of Scottish residents indicate that their family is affected by marine litter a great deal or a fair amount. Many individuals felt reducing marine litter in Scotland is a joint responsibility which requires both residents and businesses to commit to more responsible use of the marine environment, as well as for both local authorities and the Scottish Government.

The majority of residents believe that it is the role of government and businesses to do more (82% and 84% respectively) to protect the environment, although women were more likely to indicate that households should also take responsibility. Opinions as to who should take the majority of responsibility for coastal and marine protection also varies with age and location, with younger people and those living in coastal zones more likely to identify local councils and the Scottish Government as being responsible.

On strategic management and decision-making on issues relating to the marine environment over half of Scottish residents believe the government should listen to the scientific community more than the public. Only around a quarter indicated that Government should pay equal attention to the science community and to members of the public. Scottish residents tend to believe that the cost of managing marine

industries to protect Scotland's coast and sea should be met by taxes or fees from the marine industries that use it, instead of all taxpayers in Scotland.

Generally, knowledge among Scottish residents about existing management measures such as marine protected areas (MPAs) is low. Only 14 reported they are very or quite familiar with MPAs, while 37% have not heard of them at all. Once respondents were read a description of the aims and potential impacts of MPAs the majority (80%) of Scottish residents said that they supported their creation, with only 1% opposing them. This support was mirrored in discussions with groups of members of the public, many saying that designation of parts of the marine environment as MPAs is a positive step towards protecting the environment. However, some were surprised to hear that MPA's currently only cover 22% of Scotland's seas, which they felt was quite low.

Opposition to MPAs was highest amongst people who argue that the Government should pay more attention to the public, as opposed to those that believe it should pay more attention to scientists (16% vs. 1%). This is likely due to this group focusing on the people related impacts, for example industries being restricted, and any potential negative impacts this may have on jobs and livelihoods.

### **Recommendations and next steps**

The findings of this report feed into a number of important policy areas concerning the Scottish marine environment. These findings will contribute to the evidence base for Marine Scotland when developing, appraising and evaluating relevant policies. The survey findings suggest there is an opportunity to;

- Improve public knowledge and awareness of scientific research being carried out by Marine Scotland
- Improve public awareness of Marine Scotland's activities to support the just transition to net zero target and supporting marine industries to adapt in order to address public concerns that not enough is being done to protect the environment.
- Encourage and facilitate residents to learn more about Scotland's marine and coastal environment, as the report suggests a real desire among members of the public to learn more.
- Improve facilities and access to coastal areas (e.g. creating, improving, and maintaining walkways and toilets) to reduce barriers to using them.



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