

PLASTIC FREE RIVERS

2019 Impact Report

**HOW PLAYERS OF
PEOPLE'S POSTCODE LOTTERY
HAVE FUNDED PIONEERING
RESEARCH AND ARE HELPING
TO REDUCE POLLUTION FROM
SINGLE-USE PLASTIC**



Supported by players of



Awarded funds from



GREENPEACE

PLASTIC FREE RIVERS

In recent years, awareness of the ocean plastic pollution crisis has skyrocketed. From plastic bag bans the world over to the movement against microbeads, the tide is turning against single-use plastic.

But while lots of people know about the problems in our oceans, less attention has been given to the impact of plastic pollution in rivers. What lots of people don't know is that around 80% of plastic found in our oceans begins its journey as pollution dumped in our rivers and waterways.

Greenpeace has been working to change this, and in 2019 we were able to make great progress thanks to support from players of People's Postcode Lottery. This extra funding meant:

1. We were able to carry out the biggest survey of plastic pollution in UK rivers ever.
2. We could use our findings to persuade politicians and supermarkets to take action to address the crisis.

80% OF PLASTIC FOUND IN OUR OCEANS BEGINS ITS JOURNEY AS POLLUTION DUMPED IN RIVERS AND WATERWAYS.

Our findings inspired communities around the country to take action and thousands of people have joined our campaign calling for the government to cut single-use plastic in half by 2025.

ABOUT GREENPEACE

Greenpeace defends the natural world from destruction by investigating, documenting and exposing environmental destruction. We also support members of the public to build consumer pressure and demand solutions, whilst lobbying politicians and corporations to ensure change happens.

Our vision is a greener and more peaceful planet that can sustain life for generations to come.



What we did
WE CARRIED OUT THE BIGGEST SURVEY OF PLASTIC POLLUTION IN UK RIVERS EVER. THIS...

INSPIRED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE TO JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN. THEN...

WE URGED THE GOVERNMENT TO CUT THE PRODUCTION OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC IN HALF BY 2025.



Meet the team!



Fiona Nicholls, Plastics Campaigner

Fiona headed up the research team on the ground. She travelled up and down Great Britain collecting river samples alongside researchers, volunteers, local press and celebrity supporters, documenting the full extent of the problem.



Dr David Santillo, Senior Scientist

David analysed river samples collected during the project at Greenpeace's Research Laboratory at the University of Exeter. Using a cutting-edge infrared plastic detector, David was able to identify what type of plastic he found and where it came from.



Sam Chetan-Welsh, Political Campaigner

Sam devised our strategy to turn the scientific results into political action, and secured the support of an influential MP who hosted a special event at the House of Commons. There, we shared our findings with MPs.



THE RIVERS WE TESTED



Our findings

WE FOUND PLASTIC IN EVERY RIVER WE TESTED

THE MOST CONTAMINATED RIVER IN THE STUDY WAS THE RIVER MERSEY...

WHERE WE FOUND PROPORTIONALLY TWICE AS MUCH PLASTIC AS THE INFAMOUS GREAT PACIFIC GARBAGE PATCH...

800 PIECES OF MICROPLASTIC WERE CAUGHT IN JUST 30 MINUTES!



WILDLIFE

We worked with specialist photographers to document the impact of plastic pollution on British wildlife. We witnessed voles eating plastic, coots using it to build their nests and even insects like the caddisfly larvae using microplastics to make their protective casings.

THE SCIENCE

Researchers, scientists and volunteers collected river water samples from around the UK, visiting 30 locations across 13 rivers in urban and rural locations. The samples were then taken to Greenpeace's laboratory for testing, and any plastic fragments were recorded and analysed.

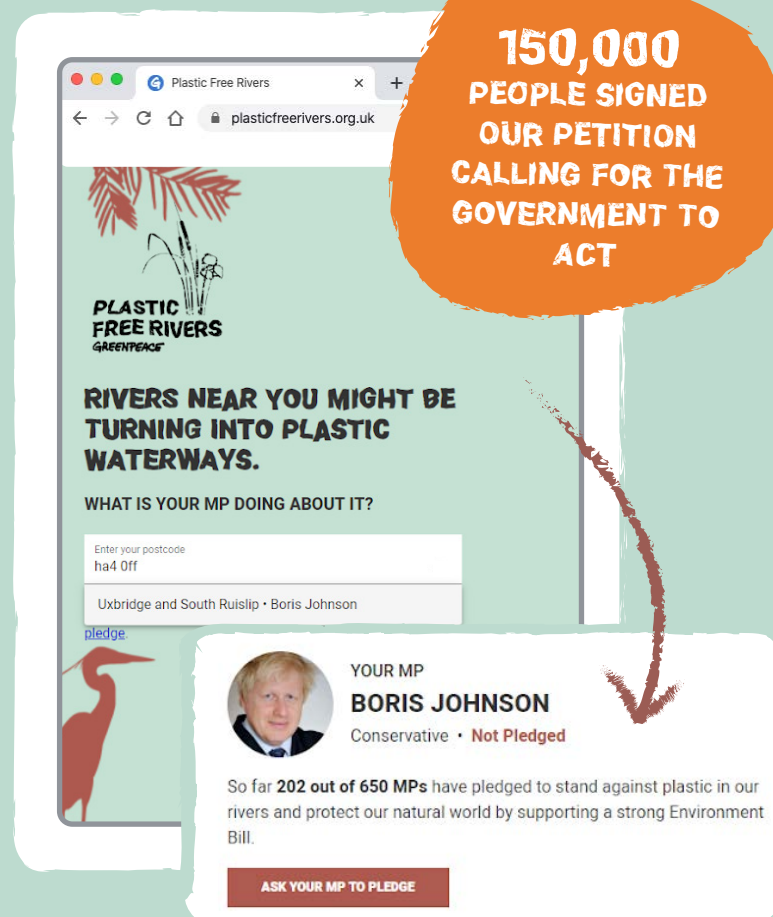
The specialist equipment we bought with the funding continues to make a contribution to scientific understanding. The 'Manta net' which we use to trawl through the water and collect plastic particles has since been used by Greenpeace in Italy for research into their rivers, and there are plans for it to be used in Germany and Spain. It has also been used to teach schoolchildren and other students about the problem of plastic pollution in rivers, and we hope to do more of this in the future.



THE IMPACT

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IS AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH

- › This project inspired thousands of people to take action for our natural world.
- › Our petition calling for the government to reduce single-use plastic was signed by 150,000 people—over 20,000 of who had never been involved with Greenpeace before!
- › We invested in innovative new ways for people to take action—like a social media tool (right) which allowed supporters to directly lobby their MP.
- › The photos and video footage we collected were shared widely online, with many people engaging in the issue for the first time.



Celebrity supporters

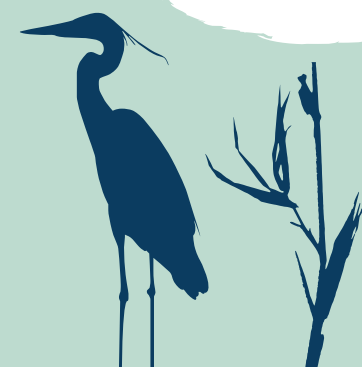
ACTOR BONNIE WRIGHT COLLECTED RIVER SAMPLES AND GAVE MEDIA INTERVIEWS. SHE ALSO STARRED IN A SHORT DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE PROJECT WHICH SHE SHARED ON HER INSTAGRAM PAGE. IT'S BEEN VIEWED OVER 360,000 TIMES!



WILDLIFE PRESENTER STEVE BACKSHALL SPOKE AT OUR EVENT AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, CREATING A GREAT BUZZ AND ENGAGING MPS



WILDLIFE PRESENTER AND FILMMAKER GORDON BUCHANAN SUPPORTED THE PROJECT BY FRONTING A MINI-DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE PROJECT



CORPORATE ACTION

As a result of this campaign we were able to persuade supermarkets to act to reduce their massive single-use plastic footprints, with Sainsbury's committing to halve its use of plastic packaging by 2025.

SAINSBURY'S COMMITTED TO HALVE ITS USE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BY 2025



POLITICAL ACTION

- › Our landmark scientific report 'Upstream: Microplastics in UK Rivers' was launched at the House of Commons at a packed event calling for plastic reduction targets in the upcoming UK Environment Bill.
- › Over 200 MPs backed our plastic reduction target and dozens shared the campaign on social media. This is rare—particularly with such cross-party support—and shows that action on plastic pollution is becoming a politically mainstream position.
- › The event led to Labour and the Liberal Democrats introducing single-use plastic reduction targets in their election manifestos.
- › The report was submitted as evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs select committee in Parliament, who hold the government to account on issues relating to the environment, and thus influenced their recommendations to government.



202 MPs PLEDGED TO BACK OUR PLASTIC REDUCTION TARGET



Tidal wave of plastic takes toll on wildlife

Kingfishers, otters and swans are being forced to live among a rising tide of plastic waste, pictures from a nationwide survey have shown.

The University of Exeter and Greenpeace are testing river water at 13 sites and analysing pollution levels. Images taken during sampling show voles eating plastic, otters swimming alongside bottles and waste in the nests of river birds.

Dr David Santillo, a scientist from Greenpeace Research Laboratories at the University of Exeter, said: "These shocking photographs show that many of our best-loved freshwater species [are] suffering the consequences of our wasteful and careless addiction to plastics."

Greenpeace says the Government should set legally binding targets to reduce single-use plastic.

MAJOR MEDIA IMPACT

- › We generated over 1,000 pieces of media coverage for this campaign from a diverse list of UK and international media. This included pieces in The Telegraph, The Times, The Daily Mail and all of the other tabloids.
- › We also secured lots of TV and radio coverage including SKY News, ITV 1, Channel 5 News and a variety of regional BBC TV programmes and radio stations.
- › This project—and the media we secured as a result—helped to shift the press narrative away from recycling as the only solution and towards reduction and reuse—a really important step in pushing politicians to act.

1,000 PIECES OF MEDIA COVERAGE WERE GENERATED BY THIS CAMPAIGN

DIRECT IMPACT

INCREASED CAPACITY

Project staffing increased from three people to seven

We've added powerful new wildlife images to our photo library which are freely available to others and will continue to support nature protection work

We grew our Political Lobbying Network—a group of volunteers who strengthen campaigns by meeting with their MPs

NEW CAPABILITIES

We were able to invest in new science equipment which is now being used by Greenpeace offices around the world

We were able to develop a high-tech online petition tool that can be replicated for other campaigns

EXTRA LEVERAGE

A major new funder increased their support eight times over when they saw the results of this project

We gained over 20,000 new regular supporters to Greenpeace

This work reinforced the image of Greenpeace as a credible scientific source amongst media, MPs and supporters

NEW COLLABORATIONS

A brilliant partnership was created with The Rivers Trust and their national work

Our scientists at Exeter University continue to collaborate with Cardiff's Biosciences team

We nurtured new relationships with celebrities including Steve Backshall who we will continue to collaborate with in the future

ENABLED IMPACT

13

RIVERS WERE TESTED ACROSS THE UK, COVERING 30 SPECIFIC SAMPLE SETS



62%

OF PLASTIC CUPS WERE RETURNED TO OUR VOLUNTEERS AT FESTIVALS



202

MPs ACROSS SEVEN POLITICAL PARTIES PLEDGED TO SUPPORT OUR REDUCTION TARGETS



40,000

SUPPORTERS USED OUR ONLINE TOOL TO LOBBY THEIR MPs TO SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN

RESEARCH

IS UNDERWAY WITH CARDIFF UNIVERSITY TO STUDY THE IMPACT OF PLASTIC POLLUTION ON OTTERS



ONE

GROUNDBREAKING REPORT WAS USED AS EVIDENCE BY THE ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE IN



SAINSBURY'S COMMITTED TO HALVE ITS USE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BY 2025



Organisational support

STAFF SALARIES FOR OUR EXPERT SCIENTISTS, CAMPAIGNERS AND COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALISTS

Science, research and documentation

EQUIPMENT AND TIME TO COLLECT AND ANALYSE RIVER SAMPLES. WRITING AND EDITING OF THE REPORT, AS WELL AS THE COSTS FOR CAPTURING THE AMAZING NEW PHOTO AND VIDEO CONTENT THAT HELPED US TO COMMUNICATE OUR FINDINGS

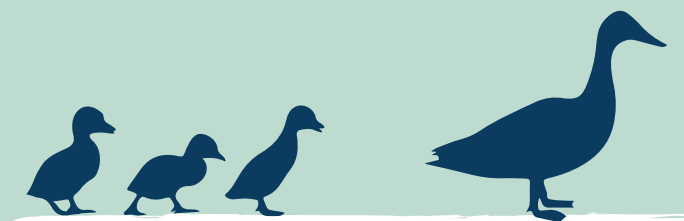
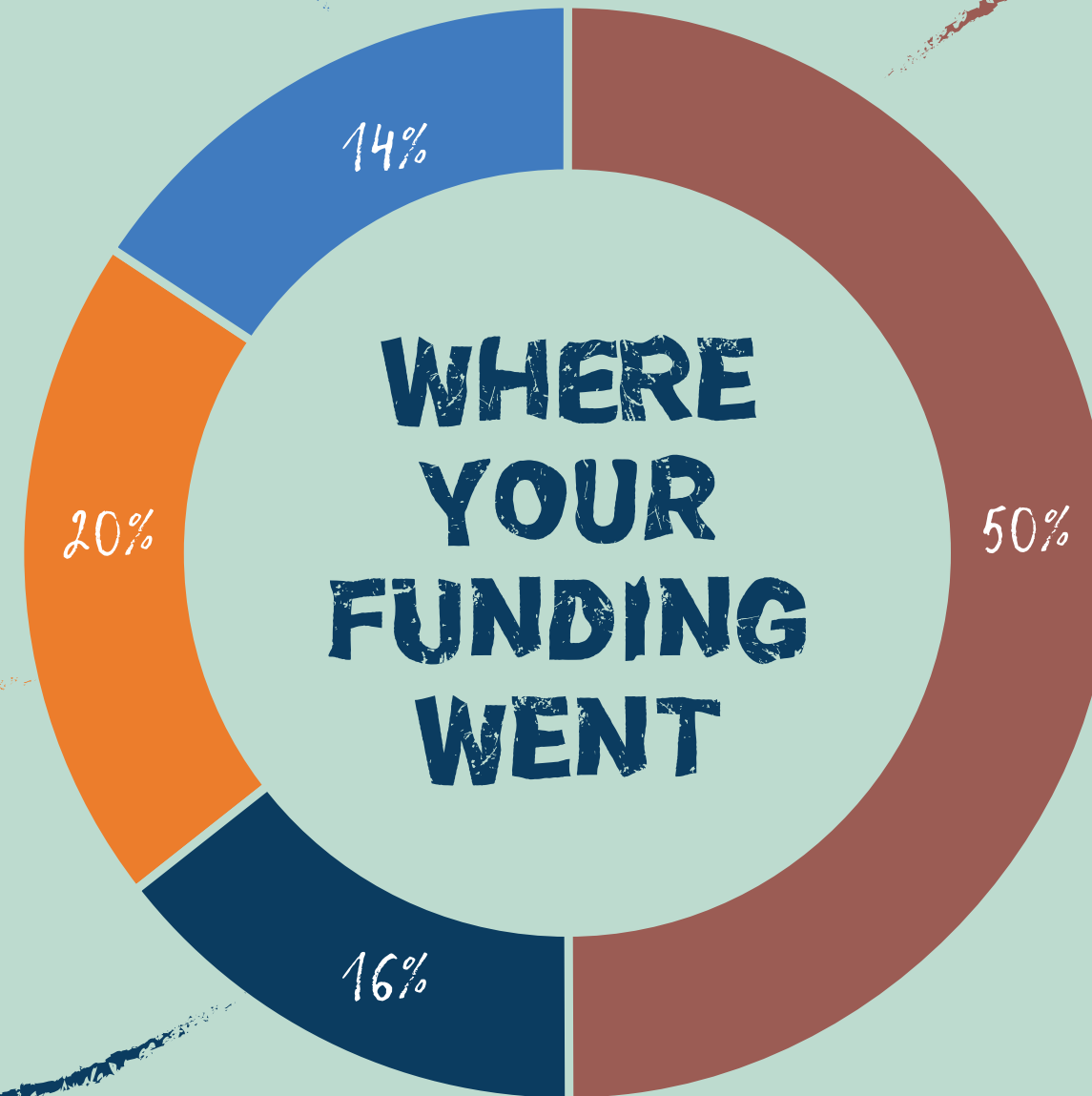
Inspiring activism and community outreach

MATERIALS, TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR OUR VOLUNTEER TEAMS WHO SPOKE TO THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE AROUND THE COUNTRY

Raising awareness

CAMPAIGN BRANDING AND MATERIALS TO ENGAGE PEOPLE BOTH ONLINE AND OFFLINE, INCLUDING THE COST OF THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT LAUNCH EVENT

WHERE YOUR FUNDING WENT



THANK YOU!

Our most heartfelt thanks to players of People's Postcode Lottery for supporting this project. You have enabled crucial scientific research and raised awareness into the plastic pollution crisis facing our rivers. This research will go on to shape the future of environmental protection across Great Britain.

We couldn't have done it without you!

