2024 Annual Report

Flotilla

FOUNDATION

Welcome to our 2024 Annual Report

The past year has brought some optimism for ocean conservation. Major global wins including the advancement of the Global Plastics Treaty, the adoption of the EU Nature Restoration Law, and renewed national commitments to expand Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are a testament to the dedication and persistence of the ocean conservation movement. On a national level, some nations have significantly expanded their Marine Protected Area networks, while others have pledged investments in a sustainable blue economy, signalling a shift toward solutions that balance economic growth with ecosystem resilience.

At the Flotilla Foundation, we recognize that meaningful change comes from both policy breakthroughs and action on the ground. Our portfolio of projects include initiatives that tackle marine pollution, habitat destruction, and unsustainable industrial practices. From strengthening protections for vulnerable marine ecosystems to supporting scientific research and grassroots advocacy, we remain committed to turning global commitments into real impact.

Despite these victories, the challenges facing our ocean remain immense and ever more complex. As we look ahead, Flotilla Foundation will continue to champion bold solutions that safeguard the ocean driving forward a vision where protection and progress go hand in hand.

— ***Melanie Smith***
Chair of the Board of Directors

When Communities Thrive, So Does Nature

This year has reinforced what many of us in ocean conservation have long known: that meaningful marine conservation requires sustained investment, collaboration with coastal communities, and approaches rooted in ecological integrity rather than short-term fixes.

If we are to create lasting change, we must reimagine conservation: building new partnerships that prioritize local voices, align our goals with public health and community resilience, and embrace conservation as a tool not just for environmental protection, but for human dignity, equity, and well-being.

The pollution crisis continues to be one of the most urgent and under-addressed threats to ocean health and to the health of communities. From untreated sewage and plastic waste to toxic agricultural runoff and industrial chemicals, pollution is not only degrading marine ecosystems but also harming human lives. Communities living near petrochemical plants and refineries are facing disproportionate levels of illness. Elevated rates of asthma, rare cancers, birth defects, and autoimmune conditions are now well-documented in regions clustered around major industrial zones. Rural and agricultural communities, too, are suffering from a legacy of agrochemical dependency, overuse of pesticides and fertilizers has not only compromised the health of our soils and waters, but is now being linked to chronic health problems among farmers and their families.

We are also deeply concerned by the growing promotion of speculative climate "techno-fixes" such as marine geoengineering. These interventions, including ocean fertilization and ocean alkalinity enhancement are often framed as innovative climate solutions, but they carry profound ecological risks as well as health and social implications, particularly for coastal communities who are rarely consulted.

In response, our foundation is focused on building a more inclusive and community-rooted conservation model. We are investing in work that connects clean water to public health, links biodiversity protection with environmental justice, and ensures that local voices drive local solutions. We are forging new partnerships with farmers, health experts, worker unions, and youth advocates to tackle these challenges together.

As you read through this report, we hope you see not only the impact of our programmes but also the direction we are heading: toward a future where ocean conservation is a powerful force for equity, health, and long-term resilience.

— ***Tamar Matalon***
Managing Director

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Strengthening the Ocean’s Resilience to Climate Change

A Landmark Win for Europe's Oceans

The adoption of the EU Nature Restoration Law in 2024 marked a monumental victory for the environment and a pivotal step toward reversing the degradation of Europe's ecosystems. For the ocean, this law represents a groundbreaking opportunity to restore critical habitats and address the biodiversity and climate crises.

The WWF European Policy Office (EPO), in collaboration with its partners, played a key role in securing this historic achievement. After a tense vote in the European Parliament, the trilogue was reached quickly between the council, Parliament and Commission. The real challenge came when obtaining formal approval of the EU Member States. Through relentless advocacy, expert guidance, and a unified voice from WWF EPO and its partners, a majority vote in favour of the law was reached, at the final minute.

Not only this, alongside terrestrial restoration, they continued to ensure that the ocean's restoration was not neglected, paving the way for healthier, more resilient seas. By highlighting the interconnectedness of people and nature, they demonstrated the immense value of restoring habitats like seagrass meadows, kelp forests, and coastal wetlands. These ecosystems not only sequester carbon but also serve as nurseries for marine life, protect shorelines, and sustain coastal livelihoods.

This victory is more than legislative progress—it's a testament to the power of collaboration in shaping an ambitious, science-based future for Europe's oceans.

Revive the Ocean: Unlock the full potential of the EU Nature Restoration Law WWF European Policy Office

The Challenge

The adoption of the EU Nature Restoration Law marks an important first step, but the real challenge lies ahead. Each Member State must now develop a comprehensive nature restoration plan and ensure its effective implementation to achieve the NRL's ambitious ocean ecosystem goals. Complicating matters further, the recent EU elections have brought in a new wave of decision-makers who are less familiar with the process and the critical requirements needed for a successful and impactful law.

The Mission

To use the Nature Restoration Law to restore the biggest ecosystem on the planet, the ocean, to help tackle both the climate and biodiversity crises.

What will WWF EPO do about it?

WWF will gather evidence from marine restoration projects across the EU and produce a publication with clear guidelines for EU and regional policymakers on effective nature restoration. The publication will highlight the interconnectedness of people and nature while establishing boundaries to prevent greenwashing.

To support broader advocacy, WWF will create additional resources, such as social media graphics and messaging, aimed at EU, regional, and national decision-makers.

To engage the newly elected European Commissioners and Members of Parliament, WWF will organize events and use targeted communication tools to emphasize the importance of ocean restoration. These efforts will highlight the critical ecosystem services

provided by a healthy ocean, from carbon sequestration to tourism.

Member States must submit national restoration plans by 2026, followed by an assessment and recommendations from the European Commission. This presents a key opportunity to shape ambitious and robust criteria for the Commission's evaluations.

“WWF has long stated that on top of protecting nature, we need to restore it. But little did we know that the Nature Restoration Law would become one of the most popular EU environmental policies and inspire a massive movement of civil society, activists, scientists, businesses, and more who rallied to support it arm-in-arm. The promise of nature restoration brought together brand new alliances and rallied our movement to carry out a highly successful campaign under exceptionally difficult circumstances. History was made and now, we get to implement the first EU law to restore nature!”

– Andreas Baumüller, Programme Director, WWF European Policy Office

Ending pollution in our waterways

A Turning Point in Global Plastics Treaty Negotiations

The global plastics treaty is an ambitious initiative to tackle the plastic pollution crisis by addressing the entire lifecycle of plastics from production to disposal. Launched in 2022 under the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), the treaty seeks to protect human health and the environment by curbing plastic waste, reducing production, and eliminating harmful chemicals.

After two years of negotiations, the recent INC-5 meeting in Busan, South Korea, marked a pivotal shift from focusing solely on plastic waste to advancing a treaty aimed at protecting human health and the environment. This shift is largely due to the efforts of organisations like IPEN and BFFP, who have tirelessly advocated for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the issue, one that includes curbing plastic production and eliminating the toxic chemicals involved in the process. Their narrative was adopted by over 100 countries, leading to a unified rejection of attempts by oil-producing companies and nations to weaken ambitious treaty efforts as seen during INC-5.

Although INC-5 did not produce a formal agreement, this outcome reflects a refusal to accept a weak treaty. Far from a setback, the meeting marked a turning point, with significant strides toward reducing plastic production and eliminating problematic plastics and hazardous chemicals, key steps toward an ambitious, legally binding solution to the plastic pollution crisis.

Leveraging historic UN agreements to phase-out toxic plastics chemicals & pesticides across the globe IPEN

The Challenge

Most low and middle income countries have limited regulatory frameworks and enforcement capacity to safeguard human health and the environment from toxic chemicals, resulting in ineffective or inconsistently applied protections at local and national levels.

The Mission

To use the opportunity that the 2023 Global Forum on Chemicals provides to leverage new and existing global policy agreements to develop new national policies to protect people's health and the environment.

What will IPEN do about it?

IPEN will create a Global Outreach Group consisting of key partners focused on strengthening national policies to protect communities from toxic chemicals. This group will convene global actors, develop a shared strategy, and create educational materials to highlight the relevance of the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC) in advancing health, labour, and environmental protections.

At the national level, IPEN member groups will conduct research on toxic chemicals in plastics and pesticides in their countries, generating critical data to inform advocacy efforts. With financial and technical support from IPEN, local NGOs will document chemical exposures, assess hazardous substances in consumer products, and promote policy reforms.

Together, these actions aim to create new national policies that reflect strong global commitments to protect the environment and human health from the toxic chemicals in plastics and pesticides.

Fighting for improved chemical regulations in the EU & UK

CHEM Trust

Did you know?

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) chemicals are linked to serious human health issues such as reduced fertility, thyroid disease and cancer. These harmful chemicals are also wreaking havoc on biodiversity, disrupting the reproductive systems of wildlife, including birds, fish, and mammals, and threatening their populations.

The Challenge

The EU's primary chemicals legislation, REACH, is undergoing its most significant revision in 15 years. This revision coincides with the new EU Parliament and Commission, where newly elected MEPs must be educated to ensure that REACH remains a priority on the agenda.

The Mission

The mission is to safeguard the most protective EU chemicals regulations and restrictions within the context of the new Parliament and Commission, ensuring that all consumer products are free from harmful chemicals by 2030.

What Will CHEM Trust Do About It?

CHEM Trust will provide science-based policy solutions to today's chemical challenges, with robust scientific research playing a critical role in this effort. Focusing particularly on PFAS, the research will involve compiling the latest scientific publications, attending webinars and conferences, and engaging with the broader PFAS scientific community.

The evidence gathered will be used to advocate for revised EU legislation at all levels. The team in Brussels will continue to build relationships with Commission staff, engage with new MEPs, and work with the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) to rally member state governments in support of the cause.

CHEM Trust will also ramp up its communications efforts to raise awareness about the harm caused by chemicals and the need for regulatory action, particularly in Germany. Additionally, they will enhance outreach and knowledge-sharing with health-focused NGOs to spread this critical messaging among EU and UK healthcare professionals.

Fighting Against 'Forever Chemicals' Watershed Investigations

The Challenge

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) chemicals are now ubiquitous in the environment, a critical issue for public health and biodiversity. PFAS are a group of over 10,000 indestructible chemicals used in a huge range of consumer products. They are extremely persistent and cannot break down in the environment without human intervention.

The Mission

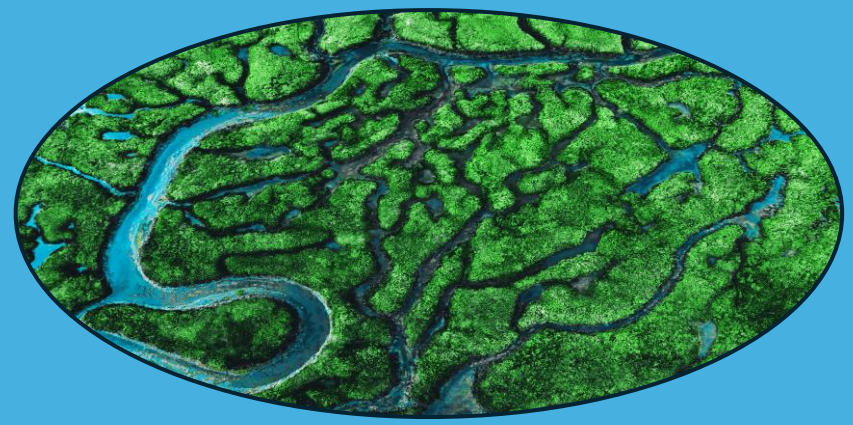
To use journalism to improve environmental and public health through raising awareness and understanding of the scale of PFAS contamination, the continued release of PFAS chemicals into the environment and the lax regulation of these chemicals.

What will Watershed do about it?

Watershed Investigations, in collaboration with leading scientists, will identify the top polluters and pollution hotspots across the UK, culminating in a series of exclusive stories published with mainstream media partners. These investigations will spotlight the industries causing the most significant damage and reveal their impacts on public health and the environment.

Building on this, and in the context of the EU considering regulations for over 10,000 PFAS chemicals, Watershed Investigations will partner with European journalists to uncover what major manufacturers and users of PFAS already know about the health and environmental risks associated with these chemicals. They will also investigate how these industries are resisting stricter regulation across the EU.

Finally, this work will scrutinize the UK government's approach to addressing the PFAS pollution crisis, which currently lags behind Europe. By highlighting these findings, the project aims to encourage the UK to follow the EU's lead in advancing regulations to curb PFAS production and mitigate its harmful effects.



"Investigative journalism is a vital tool in uncovering and driving important issues onto and up the public's agenda, which once it reaches critical mass, then places it firmly on government and regulators' to-do lists. Take the sewage scandal, for example, which has led to criminal investigations, inquiries and an overhaul in regulations. Or more recently, the UK PFAS problem, where journalism has led to a multi-agency investigation at one site, a legal case at another, an increase in resources for the Environment Agency, plans for regulatory changes, and a Parliamentary Inquiry into whether PFAS regulations are fit for purpose."

- Rachel Salvidge, Founder of Watershed Investigations

Reducing nitrate pollution in the Baltic Sea by implementing Nature-Based Solutions BirdLife Europe

The challenge

The Baltic Sea is home to seven of the world's 10 largest marine dead zones. The is primarily caused by excessive nutrient pollution from agriculture.

The Mission

To expand the use of nature-based solutions in agricultural practices in Poland and Lithuania to decrease the flow of polluting nutrients into the water basins responsible for the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea.

What will BirdLife do about it?

BirdLife will drive systemic change by developing tools to promote nature-based solutions in agriculture. This includes collaborating with stakeholders to identify barriers, advocating for increased agricultural payments for nature-based interventions, and extending education for farmers on these solutions. These efforts will create lasting change by building knowledge, supporting policy shifts, and fostering an exchange of best practices across Poland, Lithuania and beyond.

In addition, BirdLife will focus on advocacy to influence EU and national decision-making, particularly regarding CAP implementation and other critical policies. They will also raise awareness and educate farmers and stakeholders through study visits, webinars

and best practice guides while sharing knowledge with the wider BirdLife Partnership. Strong coordination between partners will ensure effective implementation and dissemination of results, creating a united effort to promote sustainable agriculture to improve the state of the Baltic Sea.

Flagship Grant

Born Green Generation

Health Care Without Harm Europe

The Challenge

The Hidden Harm In Healthcare

Hospitals and other healthcare facilities produce significant amounts of plastic and toxic chemical waste. Harmful chemicals, such as endocrine disruptors, carcinogens and substances toxic to reproduction, are widely present in healthcare products, including medical devices, disinfectants and plastics. Our over-reliance on disposable plastics not only has significant consequences for our planet, but it threatens the resilience of our healthcare systems and poses risks directly to the patients receiving care.

The environment that a baby is exposed to during its first 1,000 days, from conception to its second birthday, are crucial for its development and future health. This vulnerable stage of life, where neurological connections can form at a pace of up to 1,000 per second involves frequent healthcare visits, exposing babies, both born and unborn, to harmful chemicals and plastics found in disinfectants, plastic gloves, nappies and disposable gowns, and other products. Exposure at this critical time can lead to severe and long-lasting issues, from chronic diseases to diabetes and cancer . The toxicity has a greater impact as during this time a babies' defence system is not yet fully developed.

We believe that all babies should be born in a healthcare environment free from unnecessary plastics and toxic chemicals, giving all children a fair chance to thrive.

Catalysing Change

By transforming maternity and paediatric healthcare, Healthcare Without Harm Europe will protect babies from the harms of toxic-chemicals in the crucial first 1,000 days of their development. Now two-years into the ambitions project, toxic-free prenatal and postnatal care have never been closer to reality.

Pillars for transformational change

Healthcare Without Harm are modelling and testing groundbreaking initiatives within maternity and paediatric wards as a pilot for toxic-free and reduced plastic use in healthcare settings. The project is grounded in three fundamental pillars of action to ensure a holistic and balanced approach for transformational change. These pillars are:

Innovating practice

By piloting and promoting the adoption of circular, non-toxic materials to demonstrate that environmentally responsible and healthy prenatal and postnatal care is not only possible—but essential.

Shifting culture

By raising public and professional awareness, this focal area seeks to spark widespread demand for medical environments free from harmful chemicals and disposable plastics.

Transforming policy

Through sharing insights and actionable recommendations, this pillar aims to influence bold policy shifts that support a new standard of toxic-free, eco-conscious healthcare for parents and children.

Working with their partner hospitals and university, HCWH are driving transformational change across the healthcare sector protecting both people and the environment.

Project partners:

Berner Fachhochschule
Haute école spécialisée bernoise
Bern University of Applied Sciences

midt regionmidtjylland

CENTRE HOSPITALIER ANGOULÊME

NHS Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust

NHS The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

The Halfway Mark: Progress and Momentum

Midway through the project, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) has achieved significant milestones across all three pillars of its work. Partner hospitals have successfully piloted and demonstrated safer alternatives to toxic and plastic-based materials, proving that sustainable healthcare is both possible and practical. A dynamic media campaign has helped raise awareness, while newly developed online learning modules will enable medical students to earn academic credit while deepening their understanding of environmentally responsible care. On the global stage, HCWH has launched an impactful advocacy campaign, contributing to negotiations around the Global Plastics Treaty and influencing policy development within EU Member States. A summary of this progress is outlined below:

Innovating practice

Best practice examples piloted and used in partner hospitals include:

- Replaced single-use feeding bottles with glass
- Steam disinfecting instead of detergents
- Introducing bio-bins for placental and sharps disposal
- Introduce reusable textiles in surgery

Shifting culture

The communications campaign has:

- Reached 8,000 healthcare professionals
- Over 34 sign-ups to the Plastic Reductions pledge
- Best practices video launched
- The project was presented at 3 events and 8 articles published in international media
- 10 university modules created and ready to be published

Transforming policy

- Denmark now allows for the reprocessing of medical devices that are labelled as single-use
- The healthcare exemption has been removed from the draft of the Global Plastics Treaty
- Steering committee created to support and advocate for relevant policy changes

These achievements lay a powerful foundation—what's to come promises even greater impact for health and the planet.

Looking to the Future:

As we navigate the shifting tides of marine conservation, 2025 marks a critical waypoint, a year of reflection and renewed urgency. Halfway through the UN Ocean Decade, progress is visible, yet the scale of the challenges ahead remains immense. Key developments from negotiations on the Global Plastics Treaty to the ratification deadline for the High Seas Treaty offer hope for more coordinated ocean governance. Still, with accelerating biodiversity loss, worsening ocean acidification, and chronic underfunding of SDG 14, the need for bold, decisive action has never been greater.

Among the most pressing threats are nutrient and chemical pollution. Toxic chemical pollution, for example from from pesticides, plastics and industrial waste, also poses a lasting threat to marine life and human health, persisting in ecosystems and accumulating in the food chain threatening the existence of populations, including humans. Nutrient pollution is fuelling coastal dead zones and choking marine ecosystems, driven by decades of industrial agriculture and poor wastewater management. Tackling this crisis requires agroecological farming, better wastewater infrastructure, and stricter runoff controls.

But progress in conservation doesn't happen in a vacuum, it is shaped by the political climate. The recent global shift toward more conservative and nationalist leadership presents new barriers. Environmental regulations are increasingly being weakened or deprioritized, and funding for nature-based solutions is at risk. Efforts to highlight the links between ocean health and human well-being, including the impacts on food security, disease prevention, and climate resilience can be overlooked or downplayed. In this context, defending science-based conservation and its vital role in protecting public health becomes more important than ever.

Meanwhile, high-risk distractions such as marine geoengineering are gaining traction, pushed by those seeking technological quick fixes. Proposals like ocean fertilization or ocean alkalinity enhancement threaten to undermine genuine solutions, shifting attention away from emissions cuts and ecosystem restoration. These interventions risk disrupting marine food webs, altering biogeochemical cycles and causing damage to the ocean on a scale that could be irreversible. The ocean must not become a laboratory for untested interventions, but a space safeguarded by science, precaution, and nature-based action.

As we look ahead, 2025 is a year of choices. Will political leaders recognize ocean conservation as essential to both planetary and human health? And will investment shift from risky distractions to proven, science-based solutions that match the urgency of the crisis? These questions remain unanswered, but one thing is clear: the course we chart today will shape the future of our oceans for generations. With collaboration, courage, and a steadfast commitment to science, we must steer toward a thriving, resilient ocean.

— The Flotilla Team

The Flotilla Team

Tamar Matalon, Managing Director

Mirjam van der Zanden, Operations Director

Monique Taal, Operations Manager

Imogen Hamer, Programme Manager