



REPORT

Green Foundation Ireland

invites you to an evening online TALK
with **Declan McMenamin**,
Northern Ireland Regional Rep for
Surfers Against Sewage

Ocean Activism



Venue: by Zoom (*details given after registration*)

Wednesday 7 June 2023 – 19:00 to 20:00

Admission to this event is **FREE** but you **MUST** register beforehand.
You can do so through [our Eventbrite page here](#).

Ocean Activism

THEME

During this Talk, we explored the question of what does it really mean to be an ocean activist? It all starts with one small action, and a passion to protect what we love.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Declan McMenamin



Declan has been the Northern Ireland Regional Rep for [Surfers Against Sewage](#) for the past 5 years. His first surf lesson in 2005 on a beautiful beach in County Donegal was the start of his surfing journey. Living in County Down it was difficult to go surfing as much as he would have liked, but the more he surfed the more he became aware of the plastic pollution problem.

He came across Surfers Against Sewage while doing some research, and signed up to become a member and donate to the charity before taking on the role of a Regional Rep for Northern Ireland. He organised Surfers Against Sewage NI presence at the COP26 protest in Belfast, and also a Water Quality Protest in April 2022 alongside 11 other protests throughout the UK as part of the National Day of Action and the End Sewage Pollution Campaign.

Two years ago he moved, with his family, to County Sligo to continue his surfing journey in earnest and to continue spreading the message of protection of our seas and coastline.

ABOUT OUR FACILITATOR

Ciaran Monahan

A Researcher and Events Co-Ordinator with Green Foundation Ireland, Ciaran is a postdoctoral researcher in University College Dublin, his research thus far focussing on antibiotic resistance development risks in the environment and the **resulting** human health risks. Having graduated in zoology from UCD, he has a particular interest in wildlife, creativity and education, and has completed a study for Green Foundation Ireland on sustainability assessment in the Leaving Certificate.



ABOUT OUR TALK

Ciaran welcomed everyone to our event and introduced **Declan McMenamin**, who began his talk by explaining to us a little of his background and how he became involved with [Surfers Against Sewage](#), a UK maritime conservation NGO which was established 30 years ago as a response from the surfing community to the shocking state of the coastline. They continue to be active against sewage and plastic pollution in the sea and campaign for ocean conservation. Declan first became involved in surfing in Donegal. He soon became aware of widespread plastic and sewage pollution and joined Surfers Against Sewage. Declan is one of several Regional Reps for Northern Ireland and was involved in the team that Surfers Against Sewage sent to COP 26 in Glasgow.

The impetus for activism for himself and others was experiencing the degradation of the ocean by raw sewage and plastic, spoiling something everyone should be able to enjoy.

Originally from Northern Ireland, Declan has recently moved to County Sligo and is exploring options for a whole island basis for his activism, particularly as Surfers Against Sewage is focussed more on the South of England and many activities are not relevant to Northern Ireland.

Declan referenced surfing and seawater swimming as being very beneficial for mental health and well-being, particularly for young people.

Surfers Against Sewage have a magazine called *Pipeline* and their website gives ideas for events such as Beach Clinics, Plastic Free Schools and Beach Clean-Ups, and they advocate for plastic free communities.

In particular, Declan gave an impassioned example of pollution in Lough Neagh where 40 per cent of Northern Ireland's water is sourced. Surfers Against Sewage organised paddle outs in Lough Neagh, which is extremely polluted with sewage – a mixture of blue algae, farm run-off and sewage. This has left many dead wildlife, including dogs and swans. Unfortunately, Northern Ireland Water is ignoring the problem and saying it is algae bloom due to the heat.

Many thanks to Declan for a very interesting and informative talk.

There was a lively Question and Answer session at the end and great input from the very engaged participants who outlined their own experience of swimming in sewage, etc. Suggestions were made by some participants about ways people can become active via existing organisations:

Clean Coasts, part of An Taisce, is focused on coastal and marine litter. It encourages the formation of local groups and/or coastal clean-ups. <https://cleancoasts.org/>

Coastwatch – participate in "citizen science" in autumn surveys of the coast for marine litter and biodiversity. Test water inflows from land to sea for nitrates. <https://www.coastwatch.org/all-ireland-survey>

Explore Your Shore – free online courses on sea and coastal life run by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. There are also several surveys that ordinary citizens can do at any time. <https://exploreyourshore.ie/>

FreshWater Watch (UK-based, but also have locations in Ireland) – test fresh water for nitrates and phosphates using kits they provide. €600 funding available for groups via ChangeX. <https://www.changex.org/ie/freshwater-watch/>

You can [access our video of the talk here](#).

Green Foundation Ireland

19 June 2023