



2024

A Year In Review


Galway
Atlantaquaria®

Index

- Aquarium Overview
- Events and Education
- Community and Outreach
- Presentations and Publications
- Small Conservation Grants

Introduction

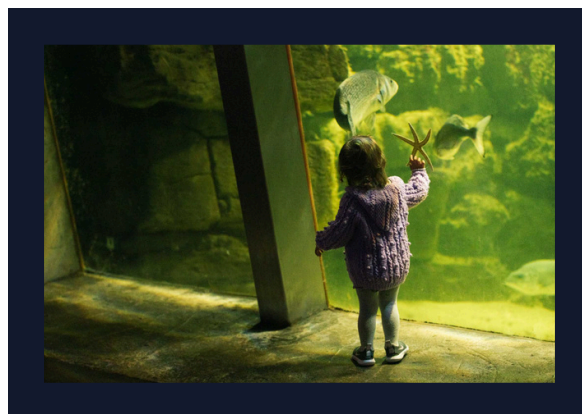
Galway Atlantaquaria, Ireland's largest native species aquarium, is located in Salthill overlooking Galway Bay along the Wild Atlantic Way. We are caretakers of hundreds of native animals from our rivers, lakes, canals and oceans.

For over 20 years, we have created a unique blend of Culture, History, and Connection to the Sea, that is reflected in our community work. As we reflect on 2024 and look forward to 2025, we have thought a lot about the events and experiences from over the last year, and our visitors and the species that call the aquarium home.

We could not have done this work without the support of our Directors Liam & Maureen Twomey, our Visitors, Volunteers, Aquarium Members, our Local Council and Community, Local Academic Institutions, and the general public.

Galway Atlantaquaria is incredibly lucky to have an amazing team, working to inspire and engage with our community and visitors, about the value of marine biodiversity, citizen science, ocean literacy, and threats to our ocean and blue spaces such as marine litter.

Galway Atlantaquaria would like to Thank Everyone who helped us in 2024. We hope you will continue to support and guide us in 2025.

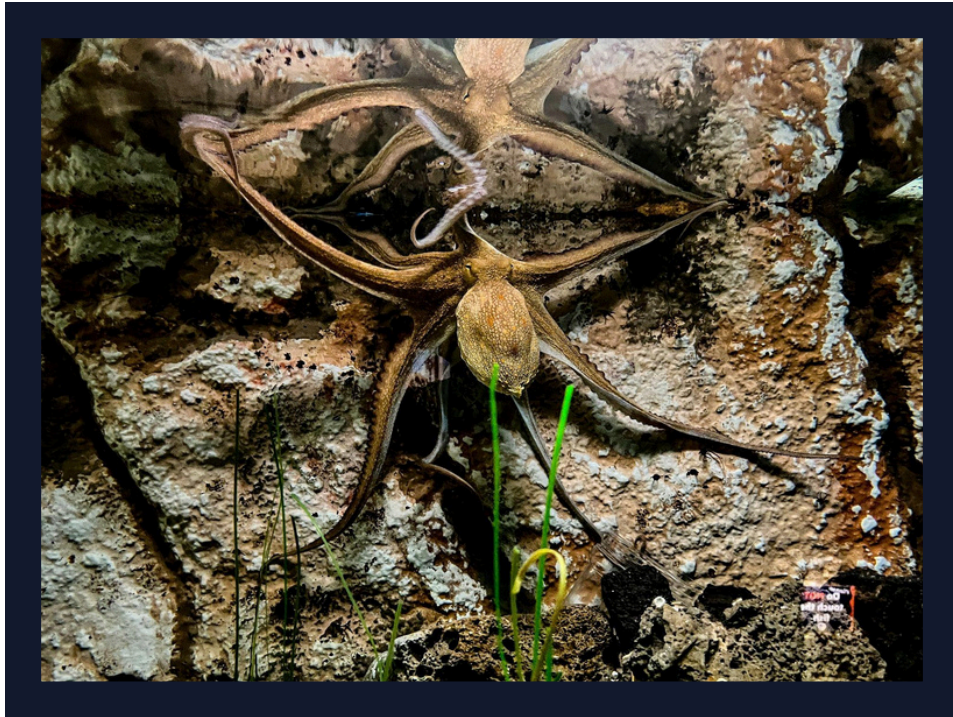


Aquarium Overview

The aquarium team was delighted to welcome over 100,000 visitors through our doors again this year, more than 10,000 of which took part in a formal workshop or tour with our education and front of house staff. We were delighted to continue our involvement with the Marine Institute's [Explorers Education Programme](#), through which we are contracted to deliver marine modules to primary schools in Co. Galway and Co. Clare and provide services to the programme and work with other Explorers Outreach Centres. 2024 was our final year as the current Secretariat of the [Irish Ocean Literacy Network](#), and we are delighted to say the Network is now established as a Company Limited by Guarantee. In 2024, we also completed with our partners the one-year participatory art project 'Galway Bay is Calling' aimed at enhancing the connection of the local community with the ocean through music. We also organised multiple beach cleans and community events, including yoga on the shore and took part in a number of national and international conferences including the UNESCO Ocean Literacy Conference in Venice. We were delighted to continue working with the local Fáilte Ireland team, promoting tourism along the Wild Atlantic Way. Our staff members contributed to book chapters and publications and we were delighted to continue our Small Conservation Grants, supporting a range of Irish Projects, and our Window Displays, highlighting local educational materials.

Over the course of the year, we upgraded a few areas of the aquarium including our nursery for the baby sharks and rays, and built a new exhibit for our Lumpfish which included a new chiller system to keep them at the cold water temperatures that they enjoy. We also moved our Octopus into a new exhibit. This allowed us to use the old Octopus tank as a new home for our Angler Fish which needed a larger space to thrive.

Animal welfare and enrichment is a very important part of the work that the aquarium team does and during 2024 we developed this program further. Enrichment involves using toys or feeding devices that provide an activity for our animals that can last anything from a few minutes to over an hour. This year we developed new activities especially for our Octopus that included puzzles that need to be solved with the prize being a piece of food or toys like a floating ball on a string that the Octopus enjoys interacting with. The aquarium team is constantly adjusting feeding and enrichment activities to ensure our high standards of animal welfare are maintained.



We upgraded a number of items behind the scenes too, in our plant room, where the life support systems are located. While these are not aspects that are visual to the public, they are integral to a healthy environment for our animals, so essential work carried out by Ian and Matt.

Garry submitted data to the National Biodiversity Data Centre Explore your Shore Programme! We celebrated World Ocean Day and had a special event for local hospitality staff, members and friends of the aquarium. Petra and Noirin continued delivering our quiet night events, and we held a number of private functions in our classroom and in the aquarium throughout the year. Marmo even made an appearance at Culture Night this year!



Over the course of last winter the aquarium was delighted to work with Mairead Brennan who created a selection of murals in our reception area and around the aquarium.



Mairead spent hours drawing and painting a selection of wonderful murals based on our native species. These illustrations also led to us to run a story writing competition for children, and publish a fantastic illustrated book by the winning entry, which was illustrated by Mairead. The Great Sea Adventure by Charlie Gannon can be downloaded [here](#).

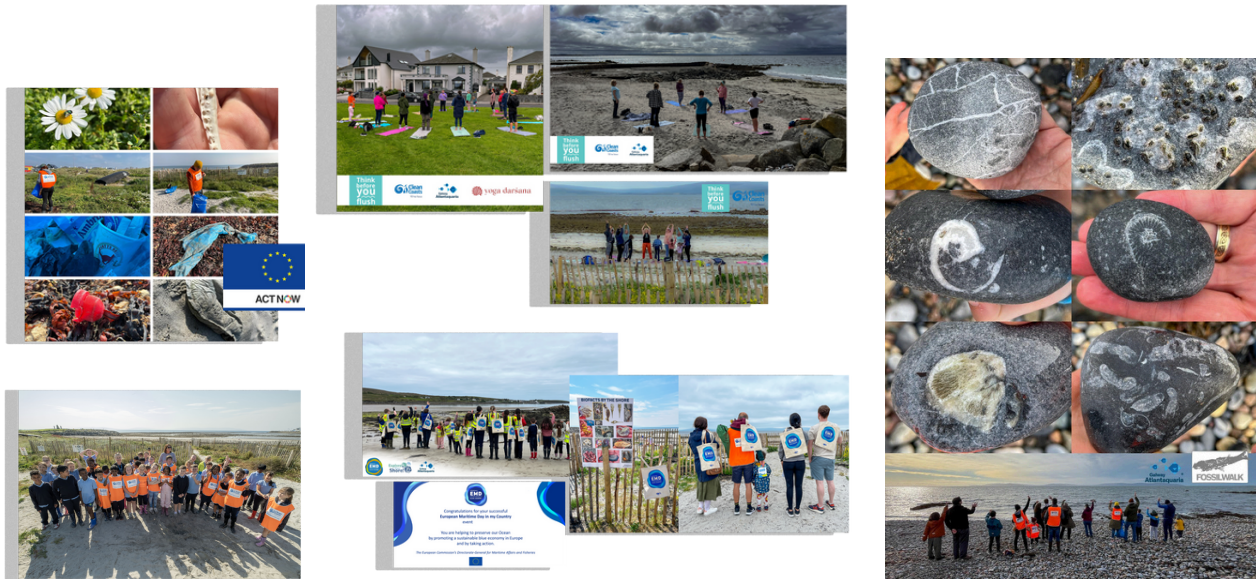


Events and Education

Through the year we were busy out and about on the shore, delivering a number of beach events. In January the Big Egg Case Hunt took place, while a number of Clean coast beach cleans took place. Each month a species survey was carried out on Grattan Beach, and over the course of the year, over 100 species of plant and animal were recorded. In April we started to record the Sand Fence Project on Grattan Beach. We took a photo of the development every week over several months. For more information see <https://nationalaquarium.ie/sandfences2024/> .



During the Summer, we hosted lots of free Yoga and other activities on the shore with the support of Clean Coasts and Galway City Council. Clean Coasts Yoga #ThinkB4UFlush Campaign. We also held a seashore event for European Maritime Day in my country, an EU Act Now Beach Clean, and delivered family workshops as part of the Baboro event in collaboration with CÚRAM. As winter approached, we held a number of Fossil Walks - A new way to experience nature and the beauty of Salthill.



The See Water Differently Campaign: Galway City, Baile na Sruthán (the city of streams)

Galway City is Ireland's capital of culture, and this culture has been molded by its close relationship with water, which has influenced the local heritage, language and economy.

Water helped elevate Galway city into a global hub for trade, expanding its influence around the world. Inspired by the #WaterWiseEU campaign, our goal at Galway Atlantaquaria was to learn more about the sources of water in Galway, and showcase the beauty of our rivers, lakes, canals, and waterfalls.



Garry travelled many miles outside of Galway to discover the sources of lakes and waterfalls that eventually feed our own local rivers. He found some truly amazing sights, like glacial lakes, hidden waterfalls and diverse habitats, learning so much about the unique geology that purifies our freshwater systems. This experience helped us live the campaign's motto, and *See Water Differently*.

Ironically, the Aquarium also noted that we have tended to focus more on the sea, so taking inspiration from the campaign to remind ourselves of the importance of freshwater stories was a fulfilling experience. After collecting photos, images, and insights, we were able to create a visual story of Galway through the lens of *See Water Differently*, and used this information to develop three photo visual brochures and a selection of Youtube videos that showcase freshwater fish species, threats to marine life, marine litter, infographics, and freshwater science activities. We also compiled three blogs, which can be accessed below;

<https://nationalaquarium.ie/seewaterdifferently/>

<https://nationalaquarium.ie/canal/>

<https://nationalaquarium.ie/waterfall/>

World Ocean Day



For the first time ever, the aquarium hosted The Plastic Collage and Climate Fresk Workshops, featuring facilitators Thomas Fruleux and Alice Camugli. Delivered as part of our World Ocean Day celebrations on the 8th of June, Thomas and Alice delved into the critical issues of plastic pollution and climate change that impact our ocean.

Culture Night 2024 - Echoes of the Ocean

For Culture Night 2024, the aquarium hosted “Echoes of the Ocean”, a marine-themed musical experience that celebrated the traditional Irish repertoire. This was part of a series of events focused on music as a means to promote connection with the ocean which have been taking place in the aquarium for Culture Night since 2022. With performances from The Fleadhwers, O’Malley Trad, and Eugene Lambe, the night was booked out, with visitors young and old visiting us during the event, on Friday the 20th of September from 6pm until 8pm. We also had origami workshops with Tom Cuffe and aquarium staff provided activity tables, talks and feeding engagements. This event was made possible by the support of The Galway City Arts Office.

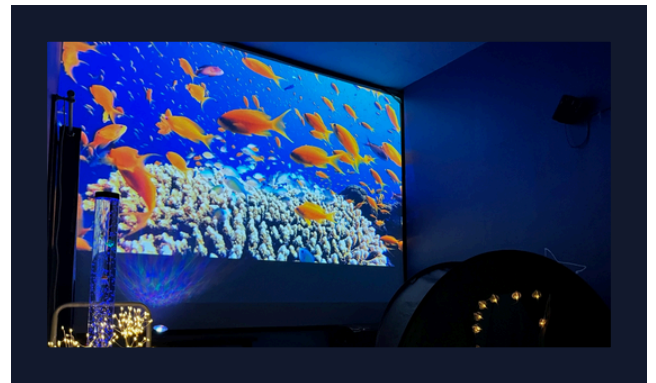
We received some lovely feedback from visitors on the night including

‘We had a fantastic time. Staff were engaging and helpful and we really enjoyed the music elements as we moved around. We particularly enjoyed the group inside the large fish tank and the gentleman upstairs in the media room with the pipes. Our 4 year old was over the moon with his badge and poster too. Many thanks to all for a brilliant family night.’



Quiet Nights

The aquarium held a small number of Quiet Night events again this year, with a limited number of tickets, and a quieter environment for visitors.



Members and Friends Night

The aquarium team was delighted to welcome our Members into our Christmas night again this year. With music and treats for all, and science activities in the classroom, it was a lovely way to get the festival season in the aquarium started.



Education

Throughout the year we welcomed over 10,000 students and visitors for a formal educational experience. These included inhouse workshops with primary and secondary students, sessions with pre-school groups, aquarium visits by students from the Atlantic Technological University and the University of Galway, and youth groups, language school students, international student groups. Some highlights from the year were

- Space Week
- Beach visits with the Atlantic Technological University
- Restoration workshops with Galway Science and Technology Festival
- Animal Anatomy Workshops with the Curious Minds Programme

Space Week

As part of International Space Week and the launch of the Europe Clipper Mission, the Blackrock Observatory in Cork went on a road trip around Ireland with former astronaut Steve Swanson. We were delighted to host their visit to Galway and had a great time with the students from Dominican College, Taylor's Hill who joined us for this event.



Steve Swanson answered all their questions on what it is like to be an astronaut, and we looked at some of the more 'alien' animals in the aquarium, and what it would take for alien life to exist. In honour of this visit, we named one of our starfish after our guest. Starfish Steve can be found upstairs in our rockpool area!

During Space Week the aquarium also offered workshops to primary school children to learn about potential alien life. They evaluated and interpreted the adaptations of aquatic animals that live in extreme environments. In the workshop they then developed their own unique animals that would be able to live in an extraterrestrial environment. The children were very excited and we were delighted to see all the creative and wonderful aliens they created during their visit.

The workshops and Steve's visit to the aquarium were featured on RTE News <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2024/1007/1474040-space-week/>



Beach visits with ATU

We were delighted to work with Rita Melia and the team at the Atlantic Technological University (ATU), from the Early Childhood Education and Care Department. In a follow on to the beach school project which began many years ago with Caitriona Ryan and Geraldine Doran, these visits help the aquarium staff to engage with early childcare practitioners and students. By exploring the features and life on the shore, we can look at ways to bring ocean literacy to groups of very young children. Materials were not only shared with students from ATU but also from Niagara College, Canada, who were visiting ATU as part of a transatlantic educational and culture exchange programme that has run between the institutions for many years.

Design an exhibit workshops with Galway Science and Technology Festival

The Aquarium was once again delighted to be part of the Galway Science and Technology Festival, and receive support for fully funded tours and workshops with over 250 children from Galway City and County. The theme of this year's event was the power of regeneration. Student learnt about how environmental conditions impact on where animals and plants live, before being asked to create their own exhibit design. Finally they headed into the aquarium to explore our native and freshwater species and habitats.

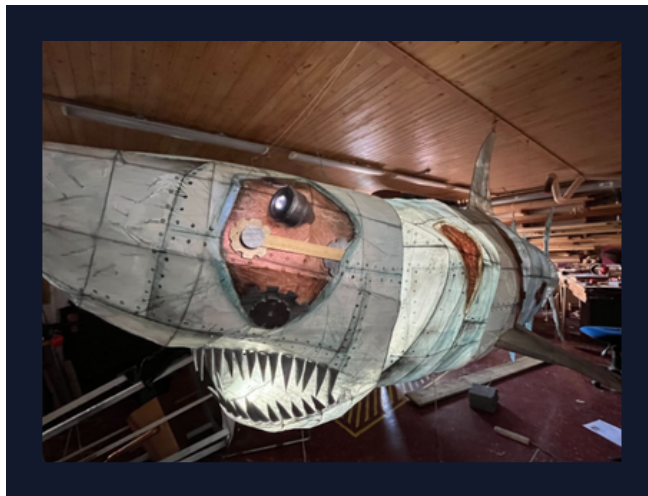
Animal Anatomy Workshops with the Curious Minds Programme

Our Animal Anatomy Workshop proved popular again, with students from junior infants to 6th class, visiting the aquarium to learn about Animal Anatomy and as part of their Research Ireland Curious Minds Award. We also held animal anatomy workshops with secondary school students, and a new module on animal care and welfare was delivered to a number of 3rd level student groups. Students were given the opportunity to explore a range of aquariums' extensive biofact collections, including shells, moults, bones, teeth and skulls. Many groups also completed a squid dissection, before visiting our exhibits and meeting our species.

Community and Outreach

Connemara Sea Week

Connemara Sea Week was first held in 1984 and celebrates the wonderful marine heritage and biodiversity of the Connemara coast. The festival is organised by the Connemara Environmental Education and Cultural Centre (CEECC) and to support the festival's goal of raising environmental awareness and increasing ocean literacy in North West Connemara the Galway Atlantaquaria delivered five workshops in local primary schools in Letterfrack and the surrounding Renvyle Peninsula on marine pollution and worked with the local YouthReach Centre to promote marine biodiversity in the area and encourage students to take part in local citizen science schemes.



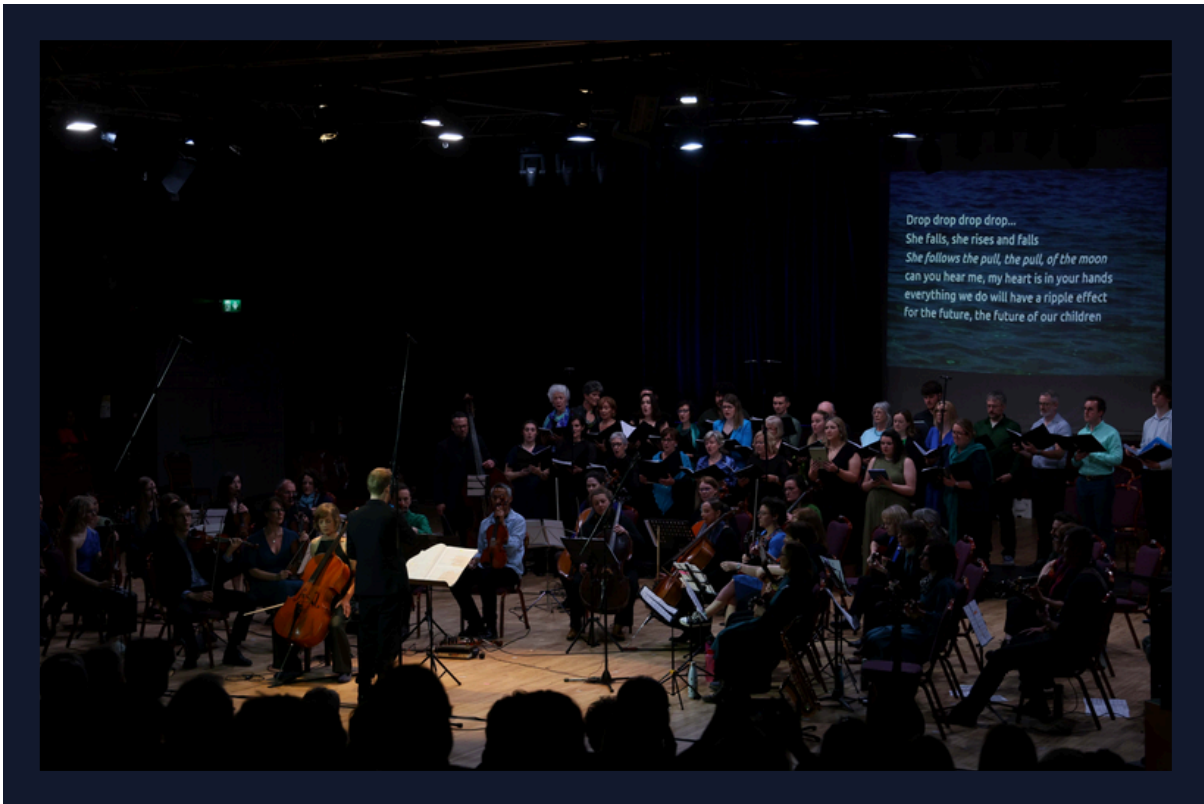
Galway Bay is Calling

Galway Bay is Calling (GBiC) was a participatory art project that Music for Galway (and Cellissimo 2024) ran in partnership with us at Galway Atlantaquaria and the Atlantic Technological University between September 2023 and September 2024. Three local community music groups were involved, namely the Galway Jam Circle, Voice of Galway and the Galway Camerata.

The project, funded through the Creative Climate Action Fund of Creative Ireland was about informing the participants about marine life, about Galway Bay, and to get them to think about how we influence the ocean and how it influences us. In fact, through a series of ocean literacy workshops, they learnt what they can do to mitigate stresses on our beloved bay and the rest of the ocean. Next they co-created an original music piece with cellist/composer/singer Naomi Berrill, who also attended the workshops. She visited the three ensembles in rehearsal to talk to them, play with them and discuss how their impressions and sounds inspired by the ocean literacy workshops could be translated into music. After that, Naomi went off and transformed all this information in 'Leave No Trace', an otherworldly music composition which herself and the three music groups premiered on the opening day of Cellissimo (18th May 2024) in Leisureland, under the masterful conduction of the talented Matthew Berrill, Naomi's brother. This beautiful community story did not go unnoticed, and Galway City Council invited the GBiC team to repeat the performance at the first Galway Climate Inspiration Festival on the 14th of September, which marked the end of the project.



GBiC involved a thorough evaluation including perception surveys, a focus group, an interview and polls with the audiences of the two performances. The results show that 100% of the musicians and singers participating in the project increased their knowledge about the ocean, its preservation and importance. However, the testimonials shared by some of the participants show more than anything else how the project was successful in increasing their ocean literacy, considered in its most recent multi-dimensional framework. In this sense, we are proud to quote Gina Mooney from the Galway Jam Circle who said *"The health of our ocean was something that I cared about before, but I am changed by the project. I feel a greater sense of connection with and tenderness for our ocean, and indeed for other aspects of the natural world which holds us all"*.



Video of the premiere of [Leave No Trace](#). [Documentary](#) about Galway Bay is Calling.

Cellissimo

As part of the collaboration with Music for Galway, on Friday the 24th of May the aquarium became the venue of one of the pop-up concerts organised in the framework of the Cellissimo 2024 International Student Programme. For 15 minutes, Margarita Guerrero, one of the eight outstanding young cellists involved in the programme, enraptured the visitors of the aquarium with the beautiful sound of her cello, in the evocative atmosphere created by the ocean tank.



Art Displays

The Aquarium put out a call again this year for art displays for our office window, which looks out onto the famous Galway Prom. This time we asked local schools and education centres to submit ideas for projects that were focussed on environment conservation, or were inspired by marine or freshwater life.

We got a diverse array of applications. They ranged from art pieces made by primary school students based on classes about marine conservation or marine litter they found on the beach, to ATU's [WARPPED project](#) highlighting ecological dangers to marine life. Keep an eye out for the call for 2025, which will happen early in the new year.



Inishbofin Summer School

The Inishbofin Summer School took place during the first week of July again this year. Teachers from around the country joined a team of experts from the areas of biology, ecology, marine, literature and history, lead by Sibeal Regan. While participants completed their classes, walks and activities, the course this year was deeply saddened by the sudden and tragic death of John Burke on the 4th of July. John, who was an experienced inshore fisherman, was the brother of Tommy Burke (course tutor and local historian). Our deepest sympathies go to all John's family and friends, May he rest in peace.

Irish Ocean Literacy Network

Since its establishment in 2016, the [Irish Ocean Literacy Network](#) (IOLN) has brought together individuals and organisations working towards the IOLN vision, achieving an Ocean Literate society across the Island of Ireland. The IOLN aspires to be a central contact and dissemination point to support initiatives and collaboration opportunities between the IOLN members, and to provide a platform for engagement with relevant stakeholders. As the Secretariat, a job that has been carried out by Garry Kendellen, Noirin Burke and Maria Vittoria Marra concurrently over the last five years, the aquarium has played an active role in maintaining the network and helping it to move from an informal structure to a formal Company Limited by Guarantee in 2024. For the last three years, the Secretariat work, carried out by Maria Vittoria, has been funded through the EU Mission Ocean & Waters project PREP4BLUE, of which the aquarium was part of the consortium. During this time we managed communications with members, assisted with the organisation of regional and national meetings, shared members' news and materials through the IOLN social media accounts and website, and represented the Network at international events.



These included regional meetings in Mayo, Kerry and Wexford, and a national general meeting, held in Dublin Zoo. We also assisted in setting out four working groups, and formulating a new strategy for 2024-2030. Maria Vittoria chaired a satellite event at the Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona in April, and was part of the UNESCO Ocean Literacy Conference in Venice in June.



We are super proud of how the Network has developed and look forward to being part of it as it moves forward in a new structure over the next number of years. For more information on the Irish Ocean Literacy Network, and how you can get involved see www.irishoceanliteracy.ie





“Diving from local to global Ocean Literacy”: the satellite event of the Ocean Decade Conference

Co-organised with the Early Career Ocean Professionals Programme of IOC/UNESCO, the Escola Galí Bellesguard, the Universitat de Barcelona, and several other partners, this satellite event showcased a wide range of innovative ocean literacy initiatives from a global to a local perspective. To do so, this event gathered a collection of special guests invited to share their solutions in overcoming challenges, as well as their best practices. Four interactive panels were designed to explore the lived experiences of project coordinators across diverse sectors:

1. “Removing Barriers for Ocean Literacy”, highlighted innovative approaches, such as citizen science projects and local community engagement efforts, able to bridge gaps in knowledge and empower individuals to actively participate in ocean conservation by removing barriers such as financial constraints, limited access to educational resources, generational gaps, and cultural & language barriers.
2. “Ocean Literacy in Coastal Communities”, focused on overcoming the challenges of communicating about ocean literacy. The panel highlighted the importance of listening to all the different voices within local communities in order to enact a comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement mindful of different conceptions, beliefs and perceptions of the ocean.
3. “Ocean Literacy in Science” addressed the pursuit of ocean intelligence, which should include qualitative aspects beyond purely quantitative scientific methods. In fact, the panel explained how both traditional and non-traditional approaches, ranging from mythology to artificial intelligence, can all provide meaningful ways to reconnect the public with the environment and marine knowledge.

4. “Ocean Literacy & Water Sports” concluded that sports like e. g. scuba diving, sailing and stand-up paddle could give access to ocean literacy to wider and broader audiences, allowing them to foster their own connection with the ocean through direct contact with it. Moreover, through the inclusion of citizen science methodologies, watersports can play a significant role in supporting the collection of ocean and climate change data.



Explorers Education Programme

The Marine Institute [Explorers Education Programme](#) has been an important focus for the educational team at the aquarium since the programme was trialled with 10 primary schools in Co. Galway in 2006. Back then we helped with tanks and provided saltwater and food for the seashore species that the schools looked after in their Explorers Aquariums in the Classroom. In 2008, when the programme officially launched in Galway City and County, we visited over 25 primary school classrooms on behalf of the programme, with Explorers Aquariums, Project Modules and Seashore Safaris. The programme, which is funded and supported by the Marine Institute, Ireland’s state agency for marine research, technology development and innovation in Ireland, has grown considerably since then. Now reaching over 400 classrooms a year, the programme is facilitated by a network of outreach centres and teams, with an outreach officer in each coastal county. Schools can take part in a range of modules, including the original three, plus a workshop module and whole school Ocean Champion project. The range of project themes has also expanded, so that now students can study animals from the deep sea, in The Good, The Bad and the Ugly, examine Fintastic Sharks and Sea Turtles, and explore the topics of Climate Change and the Ocean and coming soon, Renewable Ocean Energy.

The aquarium is currently the Explorers Outreach Centre for Co. Galway and Co. Clare. We have been privileged to meet with schools in Co. Galway since 2008, and Sibeal Regan, the aquarium outreach officer, visited over 60 schools last year, as well as delivering three Ocean Champion projects, two of which went on to be national winners.



In our role as Explorers Education Delivery & Outreach Managers we assist other Explorers Outreach Centres around Ireland, including Leave no Trace Ireland, Sea Synergy, Old Cork Waterworks, Oceanics Surf School and Marine Education Centre and Seashore Kids. We also work closely with the Explorers Education & Communications Manager Cushla Dromgool Regan, from Camden Education Trust.



Through our role as Education Delivery & Outreach Managers we plan and coordinate events, both face to face and online around the country, deliver teacher and pre-service teacher training, through the Department of Education and Skills Summer Courses Programme, and 3rd level Institutions such as Mary Immaculate College, Marino Institute of Education and St, Pats, DCU. Tara Noonan, who leads our front of house team, and who is a fluent Irish Speaker, delivered the first pre-service teacher training completely As Gaeilge this year, with students from Marino on Bull Island in Co. Dublin.

We work with the Explorers Centres to collect data and evaluation and assist with team training and trialling new content. For more information about the Explorers Education Programme visit the Explorers website at www.explorers.ie or download the Explorers Impact Reports.

Presentations and Publications

Presentations

- Maria Vittoria Marra: “The Irish Ocean Literacy Network (IOLN): Scaling collective actions for Ocean Literacy across Ireland”, webinar for the BlueMissionAA Weekly Hour, 03/04/2024.
- Maria Vittoria Marra: “Diving from local to global Ocean Literacy: Exploring, sharing, and developing successful practices to know, feel and join the living Ocean”, satellite event at the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona (Spain) on 09/04/2024.
- Maria Vittoria Marra: Sponge workshop for Seasearch Ireland, online, 17/04/2024.
- Garry Kendellen and Maria Vittoria Marra: Shifting Tides: Sponges and Rockpools Webinar for the Shifting Tides project, 25/04/2024.
- Maria Vittoria Marra: 5-minutes speech about the IOLN at “Slí Sails - The importance of Ireland’s waterways for a sustainable future”, Waterford, 30/04/2024.
- Sibeal Regan: Galway Climate Inspiration Festival 2024
- Noirin Burke: “Galway Bay is Calling’: a participatory music project aimed at promoting Ocean Literacy from the West Coast of Ireland”, oral presentation at the European Marine Science Educators Association (EMSEA) Conference 2024, Zadar (Croatia), 24/09/2024.
- Maria Vittoria Marra: “Scaling collective actions for Ocean Literacy across Ireland”, talk at the Communities Caring for Water Conference 2024, Athlone, 09/11/2024.
- Maria Vittoria Marra: “The Power of music to deliver blue education and public engagement: the experience of Galway Atlantaquaria in Ireland”, oral presentation at CommOCEAN 2024, Malaga (Spain), 27/11/2024.

Publications

Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals to Young Citizens (10-16 years) A Focus on Teaching Hope, Respect, Empathy and Advocacy in Schools. Authors of Chapter 17: Dr. Noirin Burke, Pdraic Creedon and Anna Quinn View at <https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-the-Sustainable-Development-Goals-to-Young-Citizens-10-16-years-A-Focus-on-Teaching-Hope-Respect-Empathy-and-Advocacy-in-Schools/Dolan/p/book/9781032140261>



- Collective impact for ocean literacy - inspiring the next generation of ocean champions using social marketing Authors: Patricia McHugh, Cushla Dromgool-Regan, Christine T. Domegan, **Noirin Burke**. European Journal of Marketing / Emerald Publishing Limited · Nov 7, 2023
View at <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/EJM-05-2023-0414/full/html>
- The great sea adventure, winner of the Fishing for Stories , children's short story writing competition 2024 by Charlie Gannon and Illustrated by Mairead Brennan. View at <https://nationalaquarium.ie/thegreatseaadventure/>
- Biaza Blog Post Blog: build fences, build biodiversity, build new relationships, by **Garry Kendellen** View at <https://biaza.org.uk/news/detail/blog-build-fences-build-biodiversity-build-new-relationships>
- A transdisciplinary co- conceptualisation of marine identity', Research article published on People and Nature on 16/09/2024 List of authors: P. M. Buchan, L. D. Glithero, E. McKinley, M. Strand, G. Champion, S. Kochalski, K. Velentza, R. A. Praptiwi, J. Jung, M. C. Márquez, **M.V. Marra**, L. M. Abels, A. L. Neilson, J. Spavieri, K. E. Whittey, M. M. Samuel, R. Hale, A. Čermák, D. Whyte, L. West, M. Stithou, T. J. Hegland, E. S. Morris-Webb, V. Flander-Putrlé, P. Schiefer, S. Sutton, C. Onwubiko, O. Adeoye, A. Akpan, D. L. Payne. View at <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10715>
- Planning for citizen participation in the EU mission to restore our ocean and waters by 2030'. Research article published on Maritime Studies on 26/09/2024. Authors: David Whyte, Line Debaveye, Maiken Bjørkan, Vida Maria Daae Steiro, **Maria Vittoria Marra**, Jan Seys, Aoife Deane, Wendy Namisnik, Josep L. Pelegri, Carine Simon, Francesco Falcieri, Rita Giuffredi, Lucia Laurenza, Eirini Apazoglou, H. Cecilie Petersen, María Elena Carbajal, Ifigeneia Giannoukakou-Leontsini, Noemí Fuster & Cécile Nys. View at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-024-00385-x>
- The Sand Dune Story by **Garry Kendellen**. View at <https://indd.adobe.com/view/385e8a12-5874-4c94-bcb3-c96931db25c5>
- Shark & Ray Egg Case ID game by **Garry Kendellen**. View at https://youtu.be/Em88p4iqRrw?si=3T9yAs5ScfDMYGf_

Small Conservation Grants

Galway Atlantaquaria began a small conservation grant initiative in 2023, and repeated it in 2024. In 2023 it supported five small conservation projects, along the west coast of Ireland, with the aim of supporting and encouraging individuals or community groups working in marine conservation and education.

The successful applicants included The Sea Collective, run by David McCann and Cat McCann. Along with their partners Oilean na nÓg and Ionad Mhachaire Rabhartaigh, their project, the Coastal Custodians, Machaire Rabhartaigh, was based in Co. Donegal. It aimed to provide an innovative and engaging opportunity for youth from a coastal area to study marine biodiversity on their home shores – and pass their new-found knowledge on to their younger counterparts through creative and fun activities, acting as role models!

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100084104088138>



Our next project was closer to home and supported the inspiring work of Scoil Caitriona Junior Renmore, through their project entitled 'Looking After Our Oceans'. Included first, second and hearing-impaired classes, under the direction of their teachers Jane McLoughlin, Fiona Kavanagh and Laura Coade, the project aimed to use the creative art forms of paintings, stop motion animation and producing a musical to promote and spread the idea that each of us must take responsibility for our local marine environment. The project was run in conjunction with Teacher Artist Partnership-Artist Thérèse Murphy, Artist Lara Luxardi, Erasmus+ French school exchange-Genéviève Cueff from École Notre Dame de la Charité in Brittany in France, Dr. Katie O'Dwyer from Atlantic Technological University, Dr. Sandra Austen from Marino Institute of Education and Galway Atlantaquaria and the Marine Institute Explorers Education Programme.

<https://junior.renmoreschool.com/>

The Team at The Ray Project were awarded funding to use towards the Native Irish Lay Site Project, which conducted research into species of Native Irish skate. Working together with the community, the team aims to identify active egg laying sites and nurseries for vulnerable species of skate. They hope their project can help spread awareness about skates and rays in Ireland and help increase their population by protecting important areas for juveniles.
<https://www.therayproject.org/projects>



Heading south, toward the Kingdom of Kerry, we are delighted to be able to support the work being carried out by Sea Synergy Ltd founded by Lucy Hunt, and managed by Natasha Howard. Anna Kellagher completed work on the Sea Synergy Oyster Project aimed to establish the feasibility of an European oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) reef restoration within the Portmagee Channel.

This grant from Galway Atlantaquaria supported the fieldwork of a summer intern to begin assessing the distribution of *Ostrea edulis* and associated biodiversity in the Channel. The information collected provided baseline data on the marine species currently living in the channel which will be used to assess the future feasibility of restoring *Ostrea edulis* reefs in the channel.
<https://www.seasynergy.org/>



In our fifth and final project, four coastal community organisations came together to complete a survey of a unique seagrass ecosystem near Banna Beach in Kerry. The Flowering Plants of the Black Rock Pool Seagrass Project was carried out by Banna Coastcare (Rachel Geary & Maeve Ferris), Maharees Conservation Association (Martha Farrell, Huw Roberts & Martin Lynch), Banna Sea Rescue (Pat Lawlor, Sarit O'Donovan, Eoin Buckley & Steve Baker) and Fenit Coast Conservation (Ed Sheldon, Trisha O'Halloran, John Walsh, Sarah O'Malley & Gosia Horajska-Shaikh). Citizen science volunteers from Banna, Fenit and the Maharees took a careful look at the eelgrass growing in one of Tralee Bay's limestone pools, studying the underwater seagrass flowers and the way in which their seeds mature with the hope of replanting a submarine meadow west of the Maharees!

Maharees Conservation Association <https://www.mahareesconservation.com/>
Maharees Heritage and Conservation
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064712855131>
Maharees Conservation https://www.instagram.com/maharees_conservation/
Fenit Coast Conservation <https://www.facebook.com/fenitcoastconservation/>

In 2024 the Conservation Grants were readvertised and three projects were selected for funding of up to 1500 euro each. These included

- continued support for the Sea Synergy Oyster Project
- Sponges of Ireland-the Sponge Project of Seasearch Ireland;
- Irish Sperm Whale Age Assessment

We look forward to letting you know how these projects went when they are all completed, and keep an eye out for the 2025 conservation grants call which will be released next year.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the team at the aquarium, we wish to thank all our staff, volunteers, work placement students and transition year students, friends, and visitors for supporting the work we do. Without you, the people who visit the aquarium, our members and funders, we would not be able to do this work. We hope you will continue to embark on a voyage of discovery and learning with us in 2025, Noirin, Matt and Jovita (Aquarium Management Team)





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