



20
25

Annual Review



Galway
Atlantaquaria®

As this year comes to a close, we're excited to look back at the powerful moments, and people that helped us Engage, Educate, and Inspire.

20
25

About Galway Atlantaquaria

Galway Atlantaquaria is Ireland's largest native-species aquarium. Located in Salthill, overlooking Galway Bay on the Wild Atlantic Way, we care for many native marine and freshwater animals from Ireland's rivers, lakes, canals, and the ocean.

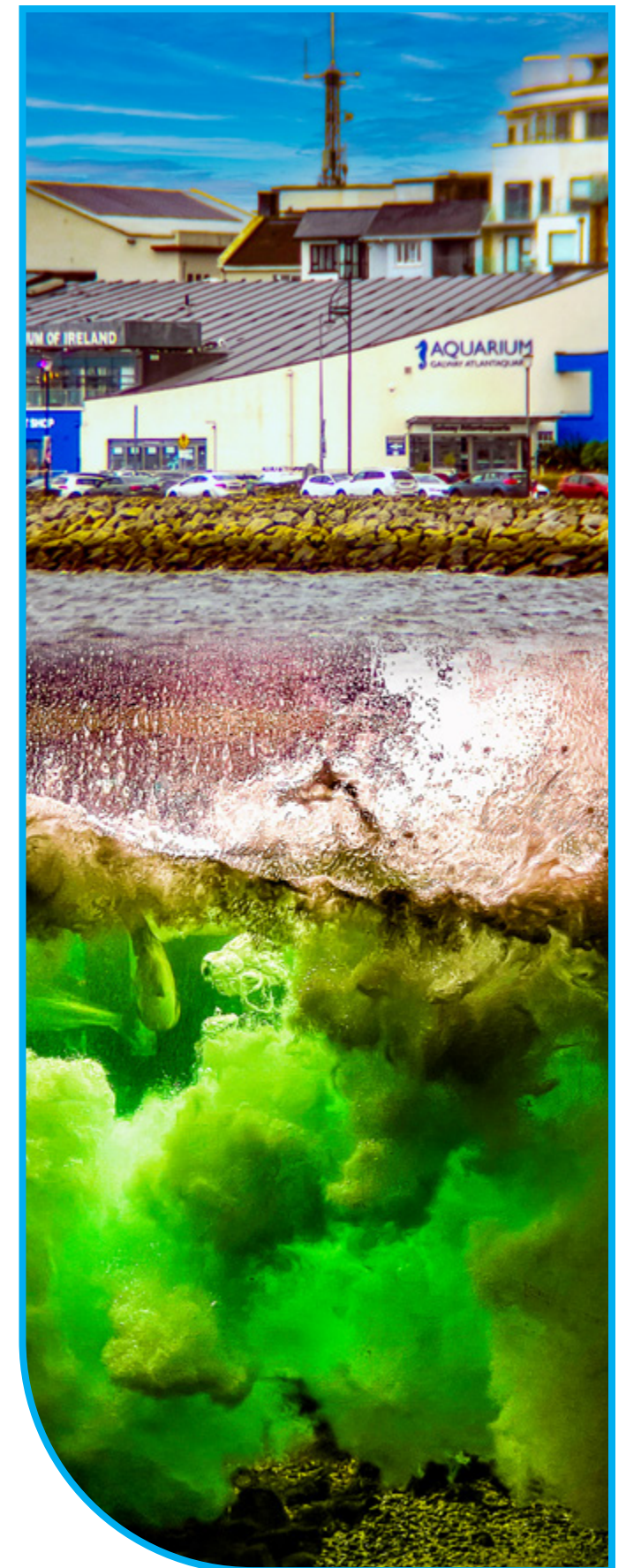
For over 25 years, Galway Atlantaquaria has combined culture, history, and a deep connection to the water - all reflected in our Aquarium presentation and community work.

Conservation and education are at the heart of everything we do. Our programmes now reach local, national, and global audiences.

Galway Atlantaquaria, the National Aquarium of Ireland, offers a complete view of the world of water. Through clear displays, live presentations, and helpful staff, we showcase Ireland's rich marine and freshwater life and natural habitats. We aim to create an enjoyable, inclusive, and educational experience - full of wonder for visitors of all ages and abilities.

Welcome to Galway Atlantaquaria.

Our goal is to Engage, Educate, and Inspire.



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

We are sincerely grateful to all our visitors, members, colleagues and friends for your commitment to promoting Ocean Literacy and supporting the work we do.

This work would not have been possible without the dedication of our staff and the support of countless local individuals, volunteers, community groups, professional organisations, local councils, EU organisations, NGOs, academic institutions, and aquarium visitors and members.

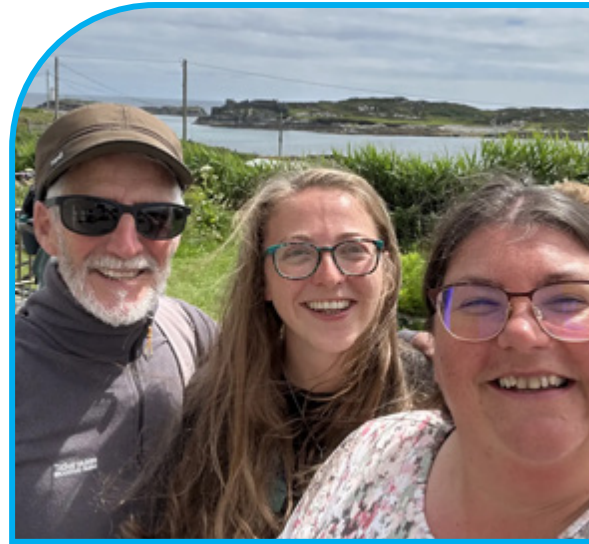
In 2025, over 100,000 people visited the aquarium, with approximately 10% taking part in an educational workshop or activity.

We attended or hosted over 50 events, engaging with more than 20,000 people.

We delivered or took part in over 50 events, in the aquarium, on the shore, online or in other venues around Ireland.

We were also delighted to help support four other local and national conservation projects through the small conservation grants, rehabilitate Columbus the Loggerhead Turtle, and be part of the International Galway Arts Festival.

Join us as we share with you some of our highlights from 2025.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Galway Atlantaquaria is delighted to announce that our Community Engagement Programmes reached over 3000 members of the public in 2025.

Each month, the Aquarium hosts a range of marine-themed activities, including Let's Talk Water sessions, fossil walks, shark & ray eggcase hunts, school zoom sessions, bat walks, Explore Your Shore adventures, and beach days. We also run a Clean Coasts beach clean, supported by the dedicated volunteers from SANDLARKS, whose ongoing help keeps our local beaches beautiful.

A heartfelt thank-you to the SANDLARKS team Ultan, Amelia, and Esmé for their enthusiasm and support.

Working on behalf of the Marine Institute Explorers Education Programme, we engaged with over 20,000 around Ireland and online.



Engage, Educate, and Inspire.

Galway Atlantaquaria, the Padden Family, and the Story of 'Columbus' the Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*)

While walking along Faulmore Beach in County Mayo on Friday, 28 February, Jonathan Padden and his family discovered what first appeared to be an unusual rock. To their surprise, it turned out to be a small Loggerhead Sea Turtle.

A quick internet search revealed that cold-stunned turtles can appear lifeless but may be saved with immediate action. The family contacted Gemma O'Connor of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group's live stranding hotline, who then alerted the team at Galway Atlantaquaria. Matt and Megan from the Aquarium arranged to meet the Paddens in Castlebar.

Jonathan took exceptional care of the young turtle—whom he named Columbus—during those vital first hours. He placed Columbus in a box with a soft towel and travelled with the car heating off to ensure the turtle warmed up slowly and safely. Thanks to his fast and careful response, Columbus is now thriving under the dedicated care of Aquarium staff and a team of veterinarians.

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank-you to Gemma and the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, as well as local vets Rita Gately and Lindsey Cox, for their invaluable support.

Our colleagues at Dingle Oceanworld Aquarium later contacted us to say they were relocating their rescued turtles and generously offered a space for Columbus on the journey. This was an extraordinary gesture, as finding carriers willing to transport stranded turtles is extremely challenging.

On Wednesday, 3 September, Galway Atlantaquaria hosted a special Farewell to Columbus event for our members—a chance to celebrate Columbus's recovery, to thank our community, and to bid goodbye to this endangered species as he moved on to the next stage of his rehabilitation journey.



Engage, Educate, and Inspire.

Think Global, Act Local

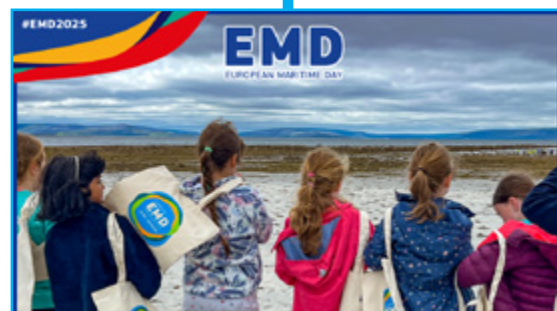
At Galway Atlantaquaria, our commitment to ocean literacy extends far beyond Galway Bay. When we say “Think Global, Act Local,” we truly mean it. Our team actively participates in international initiatives while creating meaningful, community-focused programmes here at home.

Dr. Noirin Burke is honoured to be part of the UNESCO Ocean Literacy Expert Group, representing Ireland, where she supports the implementation of the new IOC Ocean Literacy Plan of Action (2026–2030). She is also delighted to be part of the UN Decade Ocean Committee, Ireland and be on the board of the Irish Ocean Literacy Network. Closer to home she is on the board of the Galway Childcare Committee and Irish Whale and Dolphin Group.

Dr. Maria Vittoria Marra launched a new evening series, Let's Talk Water, a space dedicated to sharing personal, artistic, scientific, and community stories that explore our connections with water across Ireland—whether ocean, river, lake, canal, or transitional waters.

Four events took place throughout the year (March, May, August, and October), with the final session held during Space Week under the special title Let's Talk Space. She also co-chairs the working group on Understanding Activism for the Irish Ocean Literacy Network, and was a co-author on Marra, M.V., McGrath, S. (2025).

The Power of Music to Foster Ocean Stewardship: An Experience from the West Coast of Ireland. In: Certomà, C. (eds) Blue Kinships. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78619-8_9, which was published this year.



Petra Kerkhove represented the Aquarium in the development of a new conservation strategy for undulate rays in Irish and British waters. This important project was initiated by SeaLIFE and facilitated by the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group. While Sibeal Regan was part of a Marine Mammal Stranding Working held in Dublin Zoo. Tara Noonan headed to Cula4, to share the wonders of Irish Sharks to children as gaeilge.

Garry Kendellen held the first Clean Coasts Observer workshop on Grattan Beach, and collaborated with Galway City Council on the very popular Love Your Beach Campaign. Garry also represents the Aquarium and the Village Salthill on the newly formed Galway City Tourism Forum initiative.

While looking outward, acting locally remains central to all we do. We continue to champion ocean literacy, support EU-wide campaigns such as **#SeeWaterDifferently**, and take part in our favourite public engagement initiative, **#EMDInMyCountry**.



Engage, Educate, and Inspire.

Culture, Arts, Heritage, and Explore Your Shore!

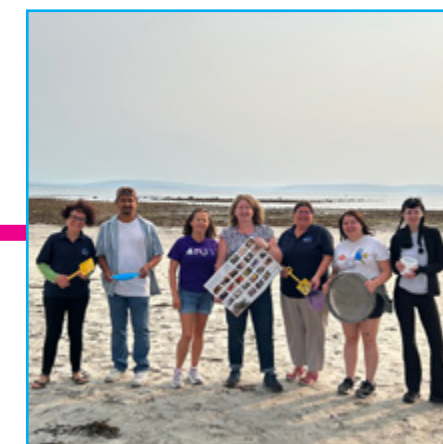
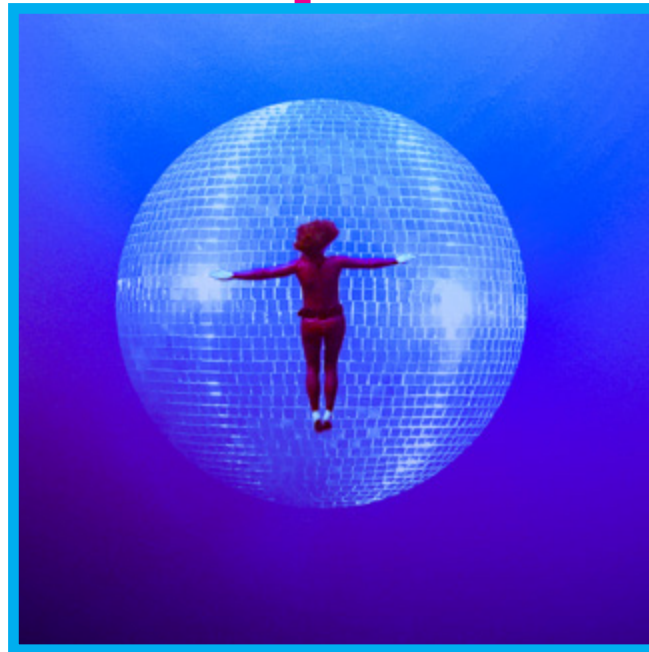
At Galway Atlantaquaria, storytelling is at the heart of who we are—shaped by both our heritage and our mission. With the support of local councils and national initiatives, we proudly serve as cultural ambassadors, bringing the wonders of Ireland's marine and coastal life to the public.

Through programmes such as Explore Your Shore! (in partnership with the National Biodiversity Data Centre), we embrace our civic responsibility to document, celebrate, and share the rich biodiversity along Ireland's coastlines.

Our Culture Night events, Baboró, CÚRAM, fossil walks, Beach Days and Heritage Week activities are designed to reveal the remarkable stories hidden beneath the waves—and tucked within the rockpools of Grattan Beach.

We understand that our history is written in stone, and we take pride in uncovering the secret tales preserved in the fossils along our shores.

We are sincerely grateful to the Arts Council for their support and their message of inclusivity: ocean literacy—and the stories it holds—should be accessible to everyone.



Engage, Educate, and Inspire.

CONSERVATION PROJECTS 2025

Now in its third year, the Galway Atlantaquaria small conservation grants was delighted to support four local and national initiatives in 2025. Bogna Griffin and Doby the Conservation Dog are testing a novel approach for detecting the native Irish White-clawed Crayfish. Working with K9 Detect in Wexford, Doby is visiting freshwater sites around Ireland to test this method for locating this endangered species, which is threatened by crayfish plague. Also based in Galway, Peter Butler and the Galway Conservation Volunteers received funding to help upgrade one of the Common Tern nesting rafts, which are based in Lough Atalia. By raising the raft, the birds can be provided with more space, which will in turn make them less vulnerable to avian flu.

Heading wider afield, Siún Ní Cheallaigh from the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group received funding to compile a photo identification catalogue for Risso's Dolphins. Using historical photos, plus a number of visits to species hotspots on the south coast, the data will help identify potential subpopulations and inform marine protected area planning.

Our final small conservation grant was allocated to Bríd O'Connor of Marine Dimensions, who will use the grant to increase data processing and create new educational resources in English and Irish (posters, guides, maps) to raise public awareness about Sharks, Skates and Rays in Irish Waters.

These grants are only made possible by Aquarium visitor support.

#EveryVisitMatters



Purse Search Ireland

Purse Search Ireland is Ireland's national citizen science database of Irish shark and skate eggcase sightings. Purse Search's data has been very valuable to conservation efforts within Ireland, having contributed to governmental reports including the Irish Red List of Cartilaginous Species, as well as the Ecological Sensitivity Analysis of the Celtic Sea to inform the future designation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

With this grant, we aim to create a collection of modern and accessible educational resources about Ireland's sharks, skates, and rays in both English and Irish.

The project will be lead by Bríd O'Connor Marine Dimensions

Engage • Educate • Inspire

Galway Atlantaquaria

Upgrade Common Tern Rafts in Lough Atalia

The Common Tern Project was born out of a realization in 2019 that the colony of Common Terns in Galway City had been falling steadily and was then only 20 breeding pairs. Any further reduction would bring the centuries old migration of Common Terns to Galway City to an end. The project focused on a number of rafts that the colony could use for breeding each year.

Two of the three rafts need to be brought onshore, cleared and raised by 100 mm to maximize the nesting space. After the upgrade is completed in September 2025 there will be three improved nesting rafts.

The project will be lead by Peter Butler

Engage • Educate • Inspire

Galway Atlantaquaria

Detection of White-clawed Crayfish in Irish freshwater systems by Conservation Dogs.

The white-clawed crayfish, *Austropotamobius pallipes* (WCC), is Ireland's only native crayfish species and is currently facing a catastrophic decline due to outbreaks of crayfish plague (*Aphanomyces astaci*, CFP).

This project proposes a proof-of-concept study to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation detection dogs as a non-invasive, biosecure tool for detecting WCC in Irish freshwater systems.

The project will be lead by Bogna Griffin

Engage • Educate • Inspire

Galway Atlantaquaria

Irish Catalogue of Risso's Dolphins

The Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) is an understudied, native Irish cetacean species. Risso's dolphins are thought to spend the winter months in offshore waters and come inshore from spring to autumn to give birth to and raise their calves.

Targeted surveys aiming to locate and collect photo identification imagery of Risso's dolphins have not been performed to date in Irish coastal waters. This project aims to generate an updated photo-ID catalogue that may be used to identify unique social groups and track their return to these calving sites.

The project will be lead by Siún Ní Cheallaigh

Engage • Educate • Inspire

Galway Atlantaquaria

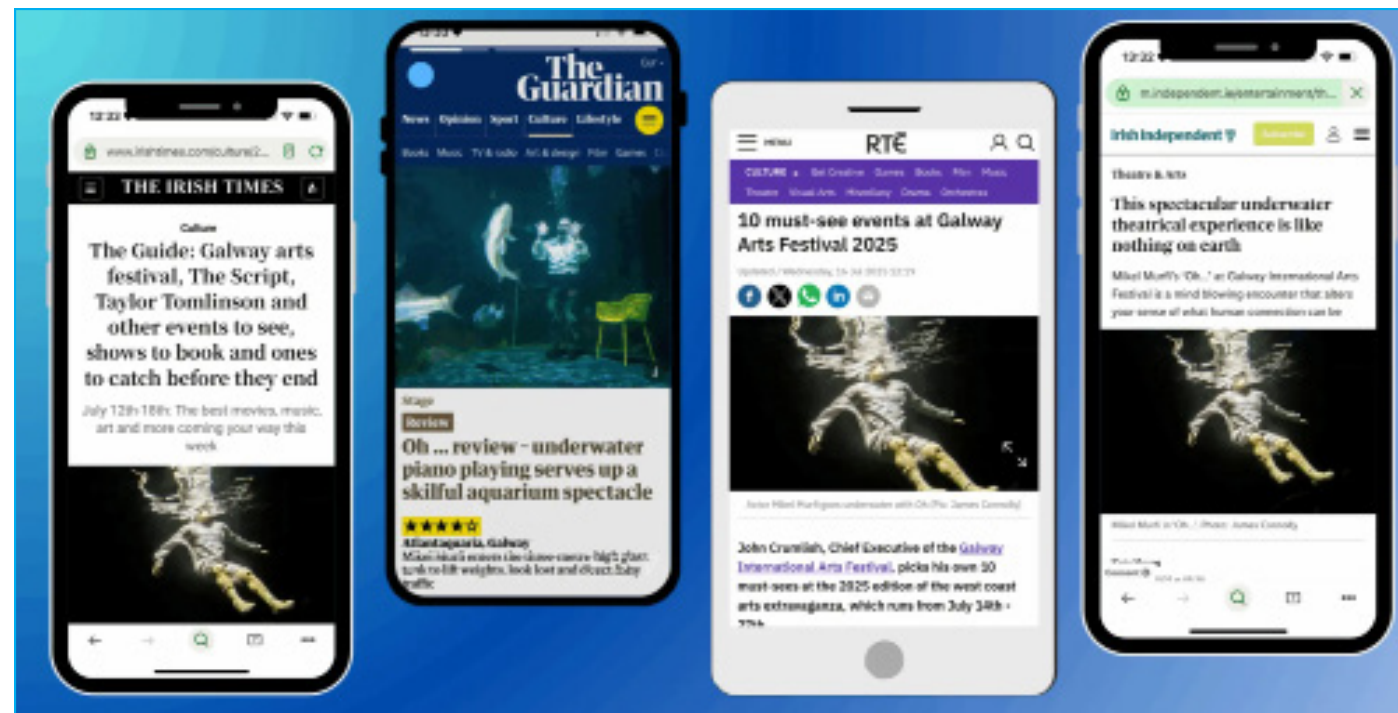
Engage, Educate, and Inspire.

Galway International Arts Festival

The International Galway Art Festival
This July, the aquarium was delighted to host the world premiere of Mikel Murfi's (also known as Micheal Murphy) underwater show entitled 'Oh'.

This 'one man show' involved over 20 people, all working collaboratively to make an art piece that is unique and intriguing, plus the aquarium team, who monitored the animals' welfare every night.

While the show was only 45 minutes long, it was a long time for Mikel to be in the water, and the uniqueness of the show created a memory that will stay with the audience for a lot longer.



Engage, Educate, and Inspire.



Engage, Educate, and Inspire.

Summary

We are immensely proud of what we achieved in 2025 and the challenges we overcame along the way. This report tells the story of a small aquarium on Ireland's west coast that consistently fulfils its mission—powered by collaboration, community spirit, and a steadfast commitment to the public good.

We are fortunate to have the support of our incredible Aquarium Shoal members. Their contributions help advance ocean literacy across academic, social, and community platforms, ensuring that every visit has purpose and impact. When visitors walk through our doors, they experience our dedication to conservation, education, and the highest standards of animal care.

As we look to 2026, we do so with renewed energy and determination—a true fire in the belly—to make ocean literacy accessible to everyone.

EVERY VISIT MATTERS

We invite you to join us in exploring the remarkable biodiversity and beauty of both freshwater and marine life, and to discover how, together, we can protect it for future generations.

Galway Atlantaquaria is social, and we share our story across a wide range of social media channels. If you'd like to stay connected, please like and follow [@GalwayAquarium](#).

