



CTA-181-Beach Cleaner Quits 'losing battle'

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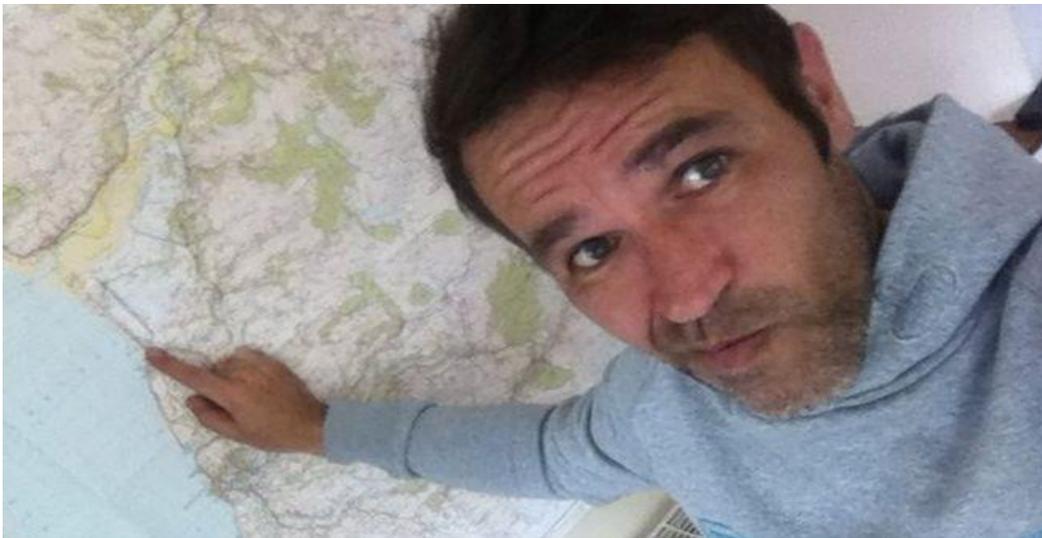
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Plastic pollution: Beach cleaner quits 'losing battle'



See local comment below article

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Image copyright ALAN COOKSO

Image caption Alan Cookson estimates he has helped clear 5,000kg of plastic off Wales' beaches

An environmentalist who dedicated himself to cleaning beaches is hanging up his litter picker because of a "losing battle".

Alan Cookson, 46, from Aberystwyth, estimates he has cleaned more than 120 beaches as a volunteer with Surfers Against Sewage (SAS).

Mr Cookson said it "breaks his heart" to stop but fears it is too late to save the oceans from plastic pollution.

He also accused pressure groups of competing, rather than collaborating.

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By his own admission, Mr Cookson "doesn't stop" picking up plastic when he is out and about, and estimates he has cleared - individually and as part of groups - at least 5,000kg (five tonnes) of plastic from Welsh beaches.

But after four years as a regional SAS representative for north Ceredigion, he has given a bleak assessment as he steps down to spend more time with his family.

"The reasons are many: we're losing, or we've lost," he said.

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"When I started it was estimated that 8,000 tonnes of plastic entered the oceans every year and there was 5.5 trillion pieces of plastic polluting them.

"Now, as I stop, the numbers are 10,000 tonnes a year and 50 trillion pieces already in there and unrecoverable."

He slammed governments and big business for failing to take the problem seriously, adding the world's oceans are "dead, or soon will be".



Image copyright SURFERS AGAINST SEWAGE

Image caption Mr Cookson said the big organizations "carve each other up" by competing for the same funding

But Mr Cookson also criticized the environmental voluntary sector.

"In my four years I've seen Surfers Against Sewage, The Marine Conservation Society and Keep Wales Tidy compete for the same pools of money, replicate each other's campaigns and generally carve each other up rather than support each other.

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"Each individual organization is trying so hard to justify its own existence that they don't want to cross co-ordinate because it weakens its own existence."

Surfers Against Sewage said it does not recognize Mr Cookson's assessment but welcomed his contribution to the "wider conversation".

"We collaborate with many, many charities," chief executive Hugo Tagolm said. "But no one in the charity sector thinks one homogenous charity is the way forward."



Copyright ALAN COOKSON

Image caption Mr Cookson says he will spend the extra time with his children

The Marine Conservation Society said it "prides itself on collaboration with other organisations and campaign groups".

Keep Wales Tidy said partnership is "essential to everything we do".

Mr Cookson added: "It breaks my heart to stop, but I have three children who have missed too many [weekends] with their dad because he was fighting something he thought we could beat."

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For over a decade WFCRC has been sharing science/research and specific articles directly related to the life of our oceans, worldwide. We share what people around the world are doing that parallels our work. It is part of our reaching out effort to normalize the playing field.

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It is so sad to see this man (Alan Cookson and his organization) giving up on environmental cleanup after estimates of clearing 5,000kg of plastic from marine environments after a few years. We did not create the problem in a few years and it is evident we will not be able to correct the issue in a few years.

We have been polluting our home for over 100,000 years in some form or another. Over time it has done nothing but logarithmically increase. We have done little or nothing to clean up what we have created.

However stakeholders like Alan Cookson and so many other devote substantial segments of their lives to a concern for our oceans and are derailed by such a monumental task. This task has the emotional equivilancy to a war and should have the same response.

I do however agree that it is difficult to keep the war effort on a defensive posture indefinitely making it even more vital to charge the next generation with keeping the effort in front of the world for a long time. This defensive posture of only focusing on where the problem ends up, is like trying to drink from a fire hose knowing that you will not be successful.

A 50,000' view of large scale issues lends it self to backing up to the point source

Its just too easy when the problem is not seen

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