



Irish
Ocean
Literacy
Network

Shared Island & Ocean



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BELFAST



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Marine Identity: Atlantic Horizons

How does life on the edge of the Atlantic shape us and our wellbeing?

Strandhill's unique relationship with the Atlantic — through surf culture, coastal heritage, wellbeing, biodiversity, and emerging ocean economies — comes together in this community dialogue event, exploring the stories, identity, and future possibilities of this dynamic coastal region.

Keynote Speaker: Dr Easkey Britton

Panel Discussion 1: Currents of the Past, Voyages of the Future

Lunch and exhibitions

Panel Discussion 2: Waves of Wellbeing



Friday, 12
June



Strandhill, Sligo



09:30-15.45



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How does life on the Atlantic edge shape us and our wellbeing?

National Surf Centre, Strandhill, 12/6/26

09.30–10.00	Arrival and Registration with tea and coffee
10.00–10.15	Shared Island & Ocean. Welcome and Introduction. (Cat McCann, IOLN)
10.15–10.45	Keynote Speaker: Dr Easkey Britton
10.45–12.00	Panel 1: Currents of the Past, Voyages of the Future Drawing on history, mythology, community memory, surf culture, economic opportunity, and environmental awareness, this panel will examine Strandhill's marine identity as both an enduring legacy and a foundation for the future.
12.00–13.15	Lunch, exhibitions and networking
13.15–14.30	Panel 2: Waves of Wellbeing This panel focuses on 'blue health', ocean therapy, future development, and inclusion through exploring blue health, ocean therapy, inclusion, and future coastal development through physical mental, and community well-being. The session highlights Strandhill as a leader in surf therapy, blue space health, and accessible ocean engagement.
14.30–15.45	Closing plenary and wrap-up discussion



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National Surf Centre, Strandhill, 12/06/26

Keynote Speaker

Easkey Britton, PhD

Easkey Britton is a pioneering marine social scientist, surfer, writer, and ocean advocate with a PhD in Environment and Society. Her research explores the intricate relationships between humans and nature, focusing on the health and wellbeing benefits of engaging with the ocean. Britton combines science, art, and activism to address social and environmental challenges. Through her books, such as “Ebb and Flow” and “Saltwater in the Blood”, she uses storytelling to make scientific concepts more accessible. Her work fosters cross-cultural connections, and advocates for environmental and social change, drawing on her deep connection to water.



<https://easkeybritton.com/>
[@easkeysurf](#)

Marine Identity: Atlantic Horizons

National Surf Centre, Strandhill, 12/06/26

PANEL 1: Currents of the Past, Voyages of the Future

MODERATOR: Dónal Griffin, Project Coordinator, Fair Seas

Donal is the Project Coordinator of the Fair Seas campaign and coordinator of the Irish Basking Shark Group (IBSG). He brings a wealth of expertise in marine conservation, fisheries and planning policy across Ireland and the UK. With a PhD in marine ecology, he has led several coalitions of marine and environmental NGOs, driving impactful activities for ocean protection.

Dónal is on the Board of Directors for the IOLN



<https://fairseas.ie/>

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PANEL 1: Currents of the Past, Voyages of the Future

Seamus McGoldrick, Sligo Surf Experience, and author of *Waking Maeve*

Seamus McGoldrick is a surf school owner and three times Irish bodyboard champion from Strandhill. He received a Save Our Planet and Clean Coasts Ocean Hero awards for his work with the environment and his Ocean Warriors Surf Camp. Seamus is launching his first book, *Waking Maeve*, on the history and heritage of Sligo this July at the National Surf Centre.



Ruth Hanniffy, Biodiversity Officer, Sligo County Council

Ruth Hanniffy, originally from Galway Bay, is an experienced nature photographer and avid explorer, a keen swimmer and surfer with a deep connection to blue health. With over 20 years' experience in conservation, ecological policy, habitat management and public engagement, Ruth is currently Biodiversity Officer with Sligo County Council, leading delivery of the County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2030. Previously, a Species Conservation Officer with the Vincent Wildlife Trust, Ruth delivered conservation programmes for lesser horseshoe bats, pine martens and Irish stoat, and contributed to international conservation and research for the critically endangered European mink. Ruth has a BSc in Zoology and an MSc Wildlife Management and Conservation, and is Chair of the national Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Network and a member of the Council of Bat Conservation Ireland.



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National Surf Centre, Strandhill, 12/06/26

PANEL 1: Currents of the Past, Voyages of the Future

Brian Parle, Ocean Awareness

Brian Parle is the founder of Ocean Awareness with a passion for connecting people to the sea through meaningful, hands-on experiences. Brian designs and delivers programmes that combine surfing, snorkelling, kayaking, and coastal exploration to build ocean literacy, confidence, wellbeing, and environmental stewardship. His work focuses on creating inclusive pathways for young people, families, and communities to engage with environment, while fostering a deeper understanding of coastal ecosystems and responsible ocean use. A lifelong surfer and outdoor educator, he believes that participation is one of the most powerful ways to develop lasting connections with the ocean and inspire future generations to care for and protect it.



Imelda McCarron, Western Development Commission

Imelda McCarron is an EU Project Development Executive with the Western Development Commission, working across a wide range of European programmes that support regional enterprise, innovation, and economic opportunity in the west of Ireland. With a strong environmental background and extensive experience in public-sector project management, she brings a place-based lens to programme design and delivery. Her work spans collaboration with businesses, regional partners, and community organisations.



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PANEL 2: Waves of Wellbeing

Alice Ward, Sea Pen Films

Alice Ward is an award-winning filmmaker and photographer, originally from Dublin, she now resides on the west coast of Ireland. She holds a BSc in Multimedia from Dublin City University. Alice's roots in Ireland and her upbringing near the sea have cultivated a profound connection to the Atlantic Ocean and its surrounding landscapes. In her work, she channels this intimate relationship in a way that is distinctly her own. Alice became the first woman in Ireland to start shooting in the water to capture surfing from a female perspective. Her acclaimed short films Ebb and Flow and Salt have helped redefine how women's stories are told within Irish surf culture.



Tom Losey, Liquid Therapy

Tom Losey is the Founder and CEO of Liquid Therapy, a multi-award-winning Irish charity that uses surf and ocean therapy to create inclusive opportunities for young people who face barriers to participating in mainstream activities. Founding the organisation in 2011, he has helped grow it from a small volunteer-led initiative into a nationally recognised charity, opening Ireland's first Inclusive Surf Centre and championing access to blue spaces for all. Passionate about wellbeing and the transformative power of the ocean, Tom has dedicated his career to creating environments where people can build confidence, connection, and a sense of belonging. Alongside his charity work, he brings over 20 years of experience in operational leadership.



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PANEL 2: Waves of Wellbeing

Allen Gilhooly, Allen Gilhooly Counselling

Allen is a therapist, supervisor across professions, community organiser, and director of Sligo Community Counselling with over twenty years' experience supporting individuals and communities in the northwest. His understanding of identity is shaped by a blend of influences: learning to sail a Galway Hooker during a TG4 project, observing the wisdom of his uncle Leo Boyle — a fisherman and marine-protection advocate — and his research into men's help-seeking, where he found striking differences among those connected to surfing and coastal communities. Growing up between the fields of Leitrim and the pull of the Atlantic, he is interested in how place, story, and coastal culture shape resilience and belonging. He brings this layered perspective to conversations on marine identity and coastal wellbeing.



Beth Brown, PhD Researcher, ATU Sligo

Beth is a PhD student with a background in human geography, and is a lover of water and being in it, or near it. Her work focuses on the impacts of pollution on water sports groups, and aims to build capacity and resilience against pollution. Her research has spent time understanding the lived experiences of pollution on water recreationists. Through a citizen science project, 'Testing the Waters', Beth hopes to both protect and utilise water recreationists deeply embodied relationships with water through practical water testing. She hopes the project might also act to deepen awareness, attentiveness and care for the waters we spend time in.





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Thank you for joining us at our Regional Meeting in Strandhill- **Marine Identity: Atlantic Horizons**

Since its establishment in 2016, the Irish Ocean Literacy Network (IOLN) has brought together like-minded individuals and organisations who passionately believe in the importance of our oceans to the island of Ireland and its citizens. The aim of the network is to improve coordination, collaboration, and capacity building of the island's 'Ocean Citizens' community to achieve a common vision – an Ocean Literate Society across the Island of Ireland.

The IOLN aims to support initiatives and collaboration between members, to provide a platform for engagement with coastal communities, and to provide training and capacity building opportunities for IOLN Members.

If you are interested in learning more about the work of the IOLN, please contact our Executive Officer Cat McCann at Cat@ioln.ie

www.ioln.ie



An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade