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FishFocus

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WOMEN IN SEAFOOD

Issue 4



FISH FOCUS CELEBRATES WOMEN IN THE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

Photo: Grace Carr

International Women's Month Celebrating the Women Shaping the Future of Seafood and the Ocean

Each March, the world marks International Women's Day as part of the wider recognition of International Women's Month, a time dedicated to celebrating the achievements of women and advancing gender equality across society. While many industries highlight women's leadership and progress, one area where their contributions are increasingly visible but still often overlooked is the global seafood and ocean sector.

Across aquaculture farms, fishing vessels, laboratories and coastal communities,

women play an essential role in shaping the future of seafood production and ocean stewardship.

Women across the seafood sector

Seafood remains one of the most important global food industries, providing livelihoods for millions and a vital source of nutrition for billions of people. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, women represent a significant share of the workforce within fisheries and

aquaculture, particularly in post-harvest activities and local markets.

Much of this work happens away from public view. Women frequently manage seafood processing operations, coordinate distribution networks, operate aquaculture hatcheries and contribute to the day-to-day functioning of coastal fisheries.

In many parts of the world, women are also central to small-scale fisheries. They help manage family businesses, maintain supply chains and pass down traditional

knowledge about marine ecosystems and sustainable harvesting practices.

As the seafood industry evolves with new technologies, improved sustainability standards and expanding global trade, women are increasingly taking on leadership roles that influence how seafood is produced, marketed and managed.

Innovation in aquaculture

Aquaculture is the fastest growing form of food production worldwide and women are contributing significantly to its development. Female entrepreneurs, farmers and researchers are helping introduce more sustainable practices that support both productivity and environmental responsibility.

Their work includes improving aquaculture feeds, advancing shellfish and seaweed cultivation, strengthening fish health management and developing better systems for monitoring environmental impacts.

These contributions are particularly important as the industry seeks to balance growth with responsible stewardship of marine and freshwater ecosystems. Women leading aquaculture initiatives are also bringing fresh perspectives to community engagement, business development and climate resilience within the sector.

Women in commercial fishing

Commercial fishing has long been perceived as a predominantly male profession. In reality, women have always been involved in fishing communities and their role continues to expand.

Today women work aboard vessels as crew members and skippers, oversee fisheries monitoring programmes and lead organisations representing fishing communities. They also play key roles in fisheries management, advocacy and policy discussions.

Groups such as the Women in Seafood Industry Association and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers help bring greater visibility to women working throughout the seafood supply chain. Their work focuses on improving labour conditions, supporting professional development and ensuring that women's voices are included in decisions affecting fisheries.

Advancing marine science

Women are also shaping the future of the oceans through scientific research. Marine scientists around the world are studying the complex challenges facing ocean ecosystems and fisheries.

Organisations including The Oceanography Society and Women in Ocean Science support networks that encourage women to pursue careers in ocean research and leadership.

Their research addresses critical issues such as marine biodiversity, climate change, fisheries sustainability, ocean chemistry and habitat restoration. The knowledge generated by these scientists helps guide conservation strategies and inform policies designed to protect marine environments.

Continuing challenges

Despite the progress made in recent years, women across the seafood sector still face a range of barriers. These can include limited access to financing, fewer opportunities for advancement, unequal recognition of their work and under-representation in decision-making bodies.

International initiatives supported by organisations such as UN Women and the Food and Agriculture Organisation are working to address these challenges by promoting gender equality within fisheries governance and supporting programmes that empower women throughout the seafood value chain.

Looking towards a more inclusive ocean economy

International Women's Month provides an opportunity to recognise the essential contributions women make to seafood production, marine science and the broader ocean economy. Their work strengthens coastal communities, improves sustainability practices and supports global food security.

As the seafood sector continues to evolve, ensuring that women have equal access to opportunities, leadership roles and resources will be crucial. A more inclusive industry not only advances gender equality but also supports healthier oceans and a more resilient global seafood system.

The future of seafood and ocean stewardship will depend on collaboration, innovation and diverse leadership. Women across fisheries, aquaculture and marine science are already helping to lead that transformation.

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Photo Back Cover : Jodie Kuntzsch



Jeni Adamson Navigating Scotland's Seafood future

Jeni Adamson, Seafood Scotland's Industry Engagement Manager, is playing a pivotal role in building a sustainable and successful future for the sector. Her work takes her across communities, processing facilities and classrooms – and while no two days are the same, each has a consistent theme: sharing the stories of people who make Scottish seafood world-renowned.

A career anchored in Scotland's marine world

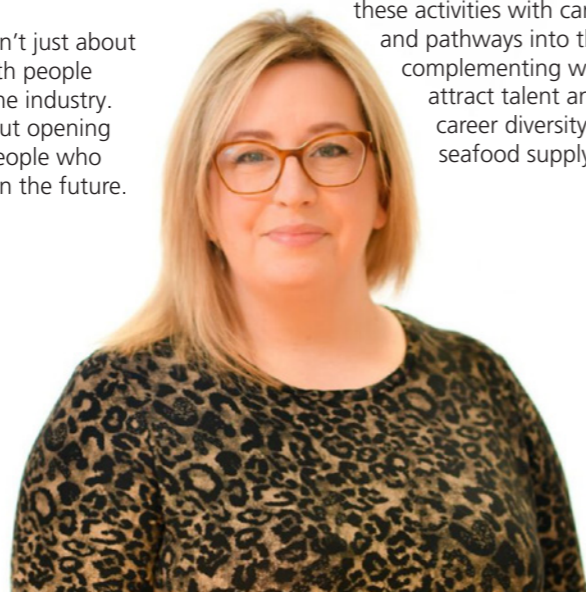
Jeni's interest in working with the marine sector has been evident throughout her career. After completing a degree in Marine Biology at Stirling University, she went on to earn a Master's in Estuarine and Coastal Science and Management from Hull University. Before joining Seafood Scotland, she worked at sector skills council Lantra, engaging with the aquaculture industry and raising awareness of the wide variety of job roles and progression opportunities available.

In 2023, Jeni was appointed Industry Engagement Manager at Seafood Scotland and – thanks largely to her wealth of knowledge and experience – hit the ground running.

"On my second day, I was sent down to Largs to trawl for langoustines with a local fisherman," Jeni recalls. "Nothing beats being out on the water with the people whose skills and knowledge put Scottish seafood on the global stage. No matter how much you think you understand the industry, there's always something to learn from the people who live it every day."

Hooking the next generation

Jeni's role isn't just about working with people already in the industry. It's also about opening doors for people who may join it in the future.



Drawing on her previous experience, she has been spearheading Seafood in Schools, a programme designed to engage young people with the seafood sector.

The programme delivers tailored workshops at primary and secondary school levels. Younger pupils explore different fish and shellfish species, often tasting seafood they have never tried before, while older pupils combine these activities with career exploration and pathways into the industry, complementing wider efforts to attract talent and showcase career diversity across the seafood supply chain.



continues to work towards lifting others up. Seeing women in C-suite roles sends a clear message: these positions are not just possible, they're genuinely accessible."

Jeni's passion for Scotland's seafood and the people behind it shines through in everything she does – her efforts connect people, ideas and opportunities across the seafood supply chain. By championing skills, sustainability and diversity, she is helping to ensure Scotland's seafood industry is well-positioned for the future.



"It sounds cliché, but young people really are our future. If we want the Scottish seafood sector to thrive, we need to spark that interest early and show them just how many opportunities there are."

"When people think about careers in seafood or aquaculture, they often think about catching, selling or processing fish and shellfish. But the reality is so much more varied than that. We also need people who are great at marketing, who work in HR, who do accounting, who can develop new technologies... the list goes on and on."

Championing women from shore to C-suite

Alongside her work, Jeni is a strong advocate for women in the traditionally male-dominated seafood space. She is a member of Women in Scottish Aquaculture and Women in Fisheries, and volunteers as a STEM Ambassador, championing visibility and access.

"So many studies have shown that diversity breeds innovation and resilience – and that includes gender diversity. Women have always contributed to this sector, often behind the scenes or in unpaid family roles, but it's vital that more of us are seen, heard, and represented across all levels."

One of the aspects that drew her to Seafood Scotland was the organisation's commitment to championing women across the industry.

"Having a woman in the most senior role makes a huge difference. Donna [Fordyce, CEO] is a brilliant example of someone who has reached the top and



Beshlie Pool Executive Officer at South Devon & Channel Shellfishermen Ltd

Growing up by the sea in a small harbour town where fishing boats were part of the everyday fabric of life would lead me, like many, towards a career with the sea. From a generation who were encouraged outside, as a child I was offered a 'job' picking shore crabs out of the nets of the salmon men who worked the river. I was a little frightened of crabs back then - but it was a way to stop me getting under the feet of the local fishing community, who were all very patient and kind to an annoying little girl.

Cut through a few years of growing up, I was inspired to go back to university to study marine environmental management. During the studies, I became aware of a disconnect between the way I saw my local fishing community and how it was viewed by others. During a time when people had no qualms about calling fishermen 'rapists of the sea' - it felt important to me to formalise my support for our local community by joining the local fishing association. Such an anomaly back then, I was asked to leave my first meeting whilst the membership discussed whether I - a woman - could actually join. They agreed, and went on to volunteer as secretary for the Association.



Next step was joining the Marine and Fisheries Agency, as a Fishery Officer - a traditionally male role, which less than a handful of women had held before. There were some challenges in the early days - but fishermen tended to be more ambivalent about a woman being the inspector, except in the rare cases women were told they were bad luck aboard the boats. The main difficulties at that time were around suitability of PPE (most of it was designed for

men) and generational expectations of women that led to some blatant sexism, including being questioned by colleagues on the ability to do the job whilst wearing lipstick.

Times have changed and continue to change. Whilst women have always been in and around fishing, historically we have been less visible than we are now. The UK Women in Fisheries (UKWIF) network, which I was involved in the founding of, aims to recognise and support women's work in fishing and to increase visibility of the varied



roles we hold within the wider UK fishing community. The team and members at UKWIF are successfully putting a spotlight on the fact that 'girls can' - and do - have a place within UK fishing, be that on the deck or behind the scenes.

Now at the helm of a long-standing fishing association (South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen Ltd), I am pleased to report that the community has never questioned how a woman could be passionate about fishing! There is something deeply satisfying about having reached a stage - both in life and within wider society - whereby I no longer have to justify my existence in the fisheries world.

The best advice for anyone with passion in life - fishing or otherwise - is do not give up. Keep doing what you believe in, keep showing up - even when it is hard. In fishing, you will find a community of people who are keen to offer their support and share their knowledge - and who will be some of the best friends you could ever ask for in life.



Hannah Fennell CEO Designate of Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association

Hannah Fennell is first female president of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the CEO Designate of the Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association, and the Chair of UK Women in Fisheries.

Hannah started her journey in fishing as a researcher with Orkney Fisheries Association, looking at the economic, social, and cultural value of Orkney's catching and processing sector.

"What really fascinated me was how dynamic the fishing industry was- a change in Chinese foreign policy could have an immediate and dramatic effect on Orcadian fishermen" she said. "I loved how complex the industry was, and how it melded modern technology and innovations with tradition, and knowledge that had been built up over generations."

From there, she moved to work for the Scottish Government's Marine Directorate where she was involved in a range of policies that included work on improving the resilience of the industry as well as enhancing sustainability. In 2020 she returned to Orkney and took over the role of CEO of Orkney Fisheries Association, and became the first female President of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation in 2023.

Now, Hannah has been named as CEO Designate of the Scottish Pelagic Fishing Association. "I am delighted to be taking on the role" Hannah said. "The pelagic fleet is one of the UK's most important and best-managed fishing sectors and is a vital part of the UK economy. My priority is to ensure that the interests of my members are clearly and fully heard by government, both domestically and internationally".

In addition to her work, Hannah is the chair of the organisation UK Women in Fisheries (UKWIF), a network for all women who work in the fishing sector. Reflecting on the role of women in the industry, she said "Women have always been a huge part of the fishing industry- but these roles are often hidden. In the 1800s it was the Herring Lasses who underpinned the success of



the fleet, and today our industry is still reliant on women- whether they be at sea, processing the catch, representing the industry, or doing the books and administration for the fishing business."

She continues "Last year, UK WIF held a joint event with Fishing into the Future which brought women from across the fishing industry and all over the country together in the same room to exchange knowledge and learn about fisheries science, management, and economics. Getting to see these women share their passion and make connections was incredibly powerful- and reinforced to me the importance of including women

in fisheries management and decision-making".

Hannah would love to see more women entering the fishing sector. "We already have so many women working in fishing- whether that is in processing, marketing, associations, or research. But I'd still love to see more women in the catching sector. What was wonderful about the event held by UKWIF and FITF is that it was attended by female fishermen- I was totally blown away by how clever and passionate they all were. It's girls like them that inspire me to do my best for the sector".

Josette Foster Breaking Barriers, a Life of Strength and Equality

From an early age growing up in the 1970s, I was always in awe of strong female role models who made their mark in what was largely a man's world. For people who know me now, this might be hard to believe, but I was a very shy child. I'm not sure exactly when that changed, but I went on to build two careers in industries that were, at the time, dominated by men.

My first step into that world came when I became the youngest, single female licensee in the country at the age of 21. I still vividly remember my day in court applying for my licence alongside the brewery solicitor. As the first female applicant, I was grilled relentlessly by the judge about licensing laws. Thankfully, I had studied that area of law at university, and held my own. My solicitor later told me he'd never seen anything like it and was deeply impressed by my knowledge and composure.

In the 1980s, I joined Gallaher Ltd, a tobacco company, as the only female member of the sales team. It was a tough environment at first, but I held my own and, in time, gained the respect of my male colleagues.

Following a long and fulfilling career in further education, first as a teacher of hospitality and later in senior leadership. I'm pleased to say that equal opportunities for women had become far more established. I never felt the need to fight for recognition in that environment, which was both refreshing and encouraging.

After taking voluntary redundancy, I purchased Fish and Chips at Weston Grove in Chester in 2016. Even in this venture, I quickly saw how assumptions about gender still lingered. When supplier reps visited, they often asked to speak to my late husband, Richard, assuming he was "the boss." It used to infuriate me, though Richard, ever my



biggest supporter, would always reply, "You'd better speak to the boss!" To this day, when sales callers of utilities ask to speak to the manager, I have to laugh. Sometimes it's easier to just say "the boss isn't in!"

In my current role on the National Fish and Chip Awards judging team, I've seen first-hand the progress women have made in our industry, though there are still moments that remind me of how far we've come. I once sat in a meeting with sales and marketing director from a food service supplier from our industry, he casually dismissed women's progress, supported by others who joined in with, "We've got to do our bit." It

felt like stepping back into the 1970s. I and others challenged their mindset immediately but it sadly probably won't change their attitude.

Thankfully, those attitudes are now the minority. I see far more men today who champion the talented and hardworking women in their teams.

As a judge, I'm immensely proud of the incredible women representing our industry, from shop owners to suppliers to those representing the fishing trade. There are too many strong, respected women to name, which speaks volumes about how far we've come as an industry.

Personally, I don't believe we need "women-only" events in fish and chips. To me, that implies there's still an issue and I believe we've moved beyond that. What we do need is more mentoring, so that anyone who wants guidance can find it.

Today, I run the business alongside my daughter, Joëlle, and her partner. Joëlle is a strong, capable woman who continues to challenge stereotypes in her own right. I'm so proud to see her take the helm ensuring that the spirit of strength, equality, and determination lives on in the next generation.



Grace Carr Marine Biologist for The Irish Wildlife Trust

I have always been obsessed with sharks, ever since I was a little girl. I worked teaching SCUBA diving for many years, going to areas known to be hotspots for sharks so that I could see the animals I'd loved all my life. Unfortunately, I started to notice a decline in their numbers. Areas that should have been full of sharks were now missing a top predator from their ecosystem and a vital link in keeping the oceans healthy. It was devastating to realise and that's one of the reasons I chose to go back to school to study marine biology and then get a Master's of Research focussing on shark movements and environmental variables.

I was lucky enough to be able to volunteer with different charities and research facilities although since I was a mature student I had to balance this with full time work.

It's extremely important for anyone studying conservation to get as much experience through volunteering as they can. I come from a working class background and I am still one of the lucky ones as many people around the world do not have these opportunities. I think that's important to keep in mind.

There are many organisations globally that prioritise getting citizens from their own country on board and offering grants to make this happen. I think as women and people who care about the environment, we must also care about social justice and support organisations working to improve that.

After leaving University, I worked on a tagging programme for Atlantic Bluefin

Tuna in Irish waters. It was unbelievable to work with such an amazing powerful fish that's here on our doorstep! There is a lower number of females working in this aspect of the industry however, I always felt accepted by skippers and fishermen onboard and these relationships have continued on into my current role in marine advocacy and policy.

I now work at a national and EU level, lobbying politicians on legislation regarding marine protected areas and fisheries with The Irish Wildlife Trust.

There are many amazing women working in the environmental NGO sector advocating for better conservation measures on land and at sea. I have been able to learn from a vast team of ocean advocates



to stand up in rooms historically dominated by men and use their voice to fight for better protections in the marine environment. I'd advise any young woman wanting to work in conservation, to reach out to different organisations. While I can say that there are such a huge amount of issues facing the marine environment, you'll find many willing to help and support

anyone coming into the sector. I love how my career has taken me to so many different places and allowed me to meet and work with so many people from different walks of life. Some days can be difficult and you can get overwhelmed with what's happening in the world, but it's beyond helpful to be surrounded by like minded people all working towards the same goal.

at home and internationally and have always felt support across different NGOs.

While initially it can seem intimidating to speak out in large forums on different issues, it's important to remember that we are there for a reason. We have spent the time and effort educating ourselves on these issues, we care deeply and our voices need to be heard.

I work regularly with the fishing industry around laws which impact them and the environment. The majority are male and I can say that I have never felt this to be an issue. I believe there are bigger issues at hand which need to be addressed and everyone is aware of that. Many small scale fishing communities are worried about the future and want to work to ensure a sustainable livelihood and a healthy marine ecosystem.

I think that the number of women working in marine advocacy will continue to rise and this is a good thing. We need strong women, willing





Jodie Kuntzsch Blue Economy ambassador

When I landed in New Zealand more than twenty years ago, I thought I was embarking on a three month backpacking adventure, not starting a career. I had grown up in the cornfields of America, about as far from an ocean as you could get. The sea existed mostly in postcards and National Geographic. Our entire seafood range was tuna in a can and fish sticks from the school cafeteria.

I took my first aquaculture role on a whim, thinking it would pay the bills before I moved on to the next country. Instead, it opened a door I didn't know I was looking for. Somewhere between clambering around marine farms in rough weather, stepping onto fishing vessels at dawn, touring seafood factories on remote islands, and sitting in fishy boardrooms across four continents, I became captivated. The environment, the structures and, most of all, the people who created, led and shaped this industry pulled me in.

That curiosity has been stubborn for decades now; defining a diverse, exciting career across the global seafood industry. It carried me into some of the



most stunning corners of the world and into the company of some of the most inspiring, intriguing, hardworking and passionate humans I've ever met. My roles followed that curiosity: one year I was managing aquaculture permits in New Zealand; another, auditing tuna supply chains in southern Thailand; later, developing responsible labour standards for fishing vessels in Brussels or helping launch blue economy initiatives in the Pacific. Each new challenge felt like another chapter in a global seafood story.

Underneath all of it sat my early training in research and analysis. I was fascinated by the invisible interfaces: where sustainable seafood practices meet economic development, where transparency alters market power, where today's decisions determine whether marine resources will still be there for future generations. That analytical grounding shaped the kinds of questions I asked in every meeting, every site visit and every new initiative.

It also created opportunities I never would have predicted. I found myself sitting on both sides of the regulatory

table in New Zealand: one phase advocating for industry in Select Committees or High Court settings, the next working within government on operational and strategic priorities for the sector. Later, as a consultant and programme manager, I discovered a niche that fit me perfectly: focusing on the "non product" attributes that sit behind great tasting seafood. Sustainability, traceability, social accountability, climate resilience – the things you can't see on a plate but that define whether that plate should exist at all. I worked with clients ranging from independent fishers in remote island communities to global corporations, helping them lift performance and transparency along complex supply chains.

About five years ago, another turning point arrived. The world began to see the ocean as key to an equitable and sustainable planet. Policy, research and financing began to open to our industry in new ways. And I wanted to use everything I'd learned – including my fair share of missteps and failures – to support and champion ocean businesses and leaders of the future. That's when I set up Aleotion. Through this company, I now collaborate with founders,

researchers and changemakers across the global blue economy, helping them take ambitious concepts and turn them into real world products through tailored executive and operational support.

Being a woman in this industry has been both energising and confronting. In my early days, I was a young, foreign, blonde woman who knew nothing about fishing, walking into rooms and onto vessels where I stood out for all the wrong reasons. I learned quickly what it felt like to be underestimated, or to be the only woman at the table. I've seen sexism, exploitation and environmental neglect up close. Along the way, I had to learn to back myself, to pick my battles carefully, and to find allies in unexpected places.

At the same time, the sea introduced me to formidable leaders – both male and female – who invested in me, challenged me and opened doors. I was welcomed by crews and factory teams who cared far more about work ethic and integrity than about gender or nationality. Those relationships anchored me when the politics and power dynamics felt overwhelming.

Over the span of my career, I've watched the landscape for women in seafood and marine industries change in very real ways, especially in leadership. Today, there are more women heading research teams, chairing boards, managing fleets, running start ups and steering finance across the blue economy. International networks of women in fisheries and aquaculture – along with the connective tissue of social media – have made our contributions more visible and given us spaces to share experiences honestly, to recognise ourselves in each other's stories.

If there is a single thread running through all of this, it is the ocean itself. The ocean connects us all, regardless of where we come from or what language we speak. The more we collaborate globally, the faster we can tackle the environmental and social challenges that threaten that connection. I am a believer that many of the solutions we need are already in the ocean – in its ecosystems, in the communities that depend on it, and in the ideas of the next generation.

My hope now is simple: that as we increase the visibility, understanding and accessibility of the blue economy – particularly for women and young people – more of them will see a place for themselves in this story, and will help write the chapters that come next.



Celebrating the legacy of pioneering women in science at the MBA

For more than a century, women at the Marine Biological Association (MBA) have shaped the global understanding of life in the ocean. From the early 1900s – when women in science faced significant social and institutional barriers – to the present day, these researchers have driven discovery, advanced methods, and built the foundations of modern marine biology. This International Day of Women and Girls in Science, we celebrate the achievements of our female scientists past and present.



Dr Mary Parke and Ballantine, D

Trailblazers at the turn of the 20th Century

At a time when few women were permitted formal scientific posts, Marie Lebour joined the MBA, dedicating her career to documenting the hidden worlds of plankton. Working through two world wars, in often isolated and resource limited conditions, Lebour painstakingly mapped the life histories of planktonic organisms, describing new species and reshaping our understanding of larval development at sea. Her monographs and identification guides continue to form the backbone of plankton research worldwide.

Breaking barriers in fisheries science

In 1905, Rosa Mabel Lee made history as the UK's first woman fisheries scientist. At a time when women were routinely excluded from research institutions, Lee's appointment represented a landmark moment. Her pioneering work on fish growth and population dynamics – including the discovery of what became known as the “Lee phenomenon” – revolutionised fisheries stock assessment and remains influential in modern marine management.

Mid 20th Century innovators

The mid century brought further advances. Dr Mary Parke, a leading authority on marine algae, developed essential methods for culturing



Dr Mary Parke

microalgae. These techniques, originally created to support larval shellfish studies, became central to marine research, aquaculture, and biotechnology. Parke's collections and culture methodologies remain central tools used by scientists around the world today.

Molly Spooner reshaped our understanding of marine food webs. Working at a time when ecological science was still emerging, Spooner's

meticulous experiments on the interactions between plankton, grazers, and nutrient cycles laid critical groundwork for what would later become modern ecosystem and biogeochemical research.

Dr Eve Southward – A pioneer of deep sea and intertidal science

Dr Eve Southward contributed over six decades of groundbreaking research. Her work after the 1967 Torrey Canyon oil spill revealed the serious harm caused by chemical dispersants, helping change global oil spill response practices. Although unpaid, she worked closely with her husband Professor Alan Southward, and together they carried out the early intertidal surveys that became the foundation of MarClim. Eve continued publishing into her nineties and remained a much loved presence at the MBA – curious, insightful, and ever dedicated to marine science.

Today's researchers carrying the legacy forward

Today, women scientists at the Marine Biological Association continue to drive innovation across disciplines, building on this extraordinary heritage.



Marie Lebour

- Dr Alice Horton bridges marine microbiology and environmental pollution, producing influential research on microplastics, chemical contaminants, and their interactions with marine organisms and ecosystems.
- Dr Katherine Helliwell, a rising leader in microalgal physiology and molecular biology, uncovers the essential processes that underpin algal growth, nutrient uptake, and cellular communication – research that informs climate science, carbon cycling, and biotechnology.
- Dr Nova Mieszkowska leads internationally recognised long term climate and biodiversity monitoring programmes, generating some of the UK's most comprehensive datasets on coastal change and species distribution shifts.
- Dr Clare Ostle drives global-scale plankton research through the Continuous Plankton Recorder Survey, connecting decades of biological sampling to pressing questions on climate change, ocean health, and biodiversity loss.

Dr Alice Horton on the women who inspired her

“I'm really lucky to live in an age where there are fewer barriers to science for women and I've been really lucky to be supported by some much more experienced female leaders along the way. I hope that the women and girls



Dr Mary Winifred Parke



Dr Eve Southward

I lead will see me as an inspirational mentor.” UKRI Future Leaders Fellow and Senior Research Fellow Dr Alice Horton.

Dr Alice Horton's research focusses on how microplastics will interact with wider environmental stressors (multistressors; including chemical contamination and climate change) to affect marine ecosystems, now and into the future.

A continuing commitment to excellence

From early pioneers who overcame prejudice to work at the MBA's laboratory benches overlooking the Plymouth shoreline, to today's researchers tackling global environmental challenges, the women of the Marine Biological Association have shaped marine science for over 140 years. Their discoveries continue to influence how we understand, protect, and sustainably manage our ocean.



Photo © Reykjavik Museum of Photography

The Women's Day Off in Iceland

'The Day Iceland Stood Still' is a multi-award winning documentary celebrating the extraordinary events that led up to the 'Women's Day Off' – a day when courageous Icelandic women walked out of both paid work and household duties, effectively bringing the nation to a halt and highlighting their indispensable contributions to society.

Director Pamela Hogan, working with Icelandic producer Hrafnhildur Gunnarsdóttir, created an inspiring, visually engaging and often humorous piece of historical cinema that balances celebratory narrative with thoughtful reflection. It succeeds not just as a commemoration of a pivotal event, but as a reminder of the unheralded labour that underpins society, and why remembering such stories matters.

For more information please visit: <https://www.thedayicelandstoodstill.com/>

Kvennafrí and the Fight for Equality

On October 24, 1975, Iceland witnessed one of the most remarkable demonstrations for gender equality in modern history: the Women's Day Off, known in Icelandic as kvennafrí. On that

day, 90% of Icelandic women walked off the job and refused to perform both paid work and unpaid household labour. The event became a turning point in Iceland's struggle for women's rights and helped reshape the nation's political and social landscape.

'90% of Icelandic Women walked off the job and refused to perform both paid work and unpaid household duties'

By the mid-1970s, Icelandic women were highly active in the workforce, but they faced persistent inequalities. On average, they earned significantly less than men, and household duties were still overwhelmingly seen as their responsibility. Representation in politics was dismal: only a small fraction of parliamentary seats were held by women.

Globally, the United Nations had declared 1975 the International Women's Year, sparking discussions and actions across many countries.

In Iceland, women's organisations saw an opportunity to make their voices heard on a national stage.

The Day of Protest

Rather than calling it a "strike," organisers framed the event as a "day off" (kvennafrídagur) to emphasise inclusivity and avoid alienating participants. The idea was simple but radical: if women stopped working, both at their jobs and in their homes, society would feel their absence.

On October 24, an estimated 25,000 women (nearly one-fifth of Iceland's entire population at the time) gathered in Reykjavík's city centre, with thousands more joining rallies across the country. The protest was not limited to activists or professionals, but included women from all walks of life, from teachers and nurses to factory workers and homemakers.

The results were immediate and striking. Schools and nurseries closed, leaving fathers scrambling to care for children. Businesses and offices struggled to operate. Daily life in Iceland was disrupted, vividly proving how essential women's labour was to the functioning of society.



Photo © Kristin Bergthóra Pálsdóttir

The Women's Day Off changed Iceland. Just five years later, in 1980, Iceland elected Vigdís Finnbogadóttir as the world's first democratically elected female head of state, a milestone many link directly to the momentum created by the 1975 action.

Since then, kvennafrí has been repeated on multiple occasions (e.g., in 1985, 2005, 2010, 2016, 2023 and 2025), often to protest continuing gender pay gaps and to demand broader equality. Each time, the spirit of 1975 is evoked,

reminding Icelanders of the unfinished work of the women's movement.

A Legacy Beyond Iceland

The Women's Day Off has become an enduring symbol of collective action. It demonstrated that when women withdraw their labour, both visible and invisible, societies are forced to reckon with their dependence on gendered structures of work. The 1975 protest is frequently cited in global feminist history as a pioneering example of how

peaceful, mass mobilisation can produce political change.

Fifty years later, the Women's Day Off remains one of the most powerful demonstrations of solidarity in the fight for equality. It not only altered the course of Icelandic politics but also inspired movements worldwide. Kvennafrí is more than a single event in history—it is a living tradition, a reminder that progress is achieved when women refuse to remain silent or invisible.



Photo © The Day Iceland Stood Still

Maritime charity celebrates 101-year-old Wren on International Women's Day

Former Wren visual signaller Anne Macleod-Carey, now 101, recalls her wartime determination; from defying convention to becoming the only woman invited aboard Hitler's yacht.

05 March 2026 – Maritime charity, The Royal Alfred Seafarers' Society, marks International Women's Day by celebrating the remarkable story of Anne Macleod-Carey, a centenarian resident and former Wren whose wartime service demonstrates the courage and determination women showed during the Second World War.

Anne is now a resident at Belvedere House, Royal Alfred's specialist care home in Banstead, Surrey, where she continues to inspire staff and fellow residents with her stories of wartime service. "At Belvedere House, I'm surrounded by people who understand the maritime life," Anne says. "It's wonderful to share stories and be part of this community."

Born in 1924, Anne was just 19 years old when, in 1943, she travelled from her home in Kingswood, Surrey, to Queen Anne's Mansions in London, to enlist. She chose the Wrens for their distinctive blue uniform over the khaki of the ATS.

Following rigorous training in Morse code, semaphore, and flag signals in Manchester, Anne was posted to Aberdeen as Ordinary Wren Stevenson. She served as a visual signaller at a port war signal station - a crucial role in coordinating naval operations and ensuring the safe passage of vessels during the Battle of the Atlantic.

She cherished the strong female friendships she formed with the four Wrens she served alongside. Her inseparable friendship with her closest friend remained throughout their lives and they supported each other through wartime sadness and heartbreak. "We laughed our way through the most awful sadnesses somehow," Anne reflects on her service. "Quite a lot of the time was terribly sad."



Among her many experiences, one stands out as truly extraordinary. While stationed at Rosyth in Scotland, Anne became the only woman, and certainly the only Wren, ever invited aboard Hitler's yacht after allied forces captured it. An American officer invited her to dinner aboard the vessel.

"The captain said, 'This is quite an occasion because you realise, you're the first woman to come on Hitler's yacht,'" Anne remembers. "He insisted I take a souvenir - half a dozen of Hitler's wine glasses stamped with the keys of Hamburg"

Anne's story embodies how thousands of women broke barriers during the Second World War, took on roles previously closed to them, and proved their capabilities during the most challenging circumstances. Over 100,000 women served in the WRNS during the war, undertaking more than

200 different roles from codebreaking to engineering.

The Royal Alfred Seafarers' Society has supported seafarers and their loved ones since 1865 and regularly celebrates the remarkable histories of its residents, preserving their stories for future generations. The organisation provides specialist maritime-focused care while honouring the service and sacrifice of those who served at sea and in naval support roles

"Anne's determination, shown by her request for boarding school at seven and solo trip to London to enlist, embodies the spirit we honour on International Women's Day," said MA Rcds David Dominy, CEO at the Royal Alfred Seafarers' Society. "Her service, and that of all the Wrens, played a vital role in the war effort, and we are honoured to share her remarkable story."



“The ocean connects us all, regardless of where we come from or what language we speak.”

