



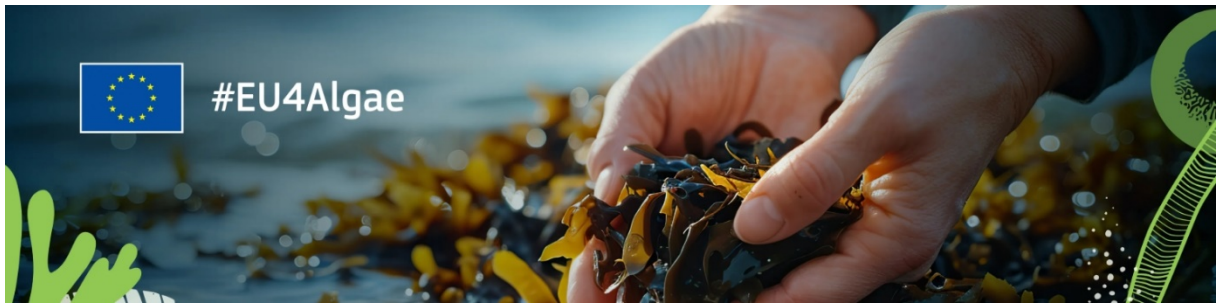
#EU4Algae

**Interview Spotlight featuring**

**Zara Hawkins**

Interview Questions





## Interview Spotlight featuring Zara Hawkins | Interview Questions

### Introduction:

1. You and your brother Ashton have been passionate about the ocean and marine life from an early age, and your Hidden Plastic campaign has grown into a globally recognised initiative. Could you tell us more about your journey so far, and how your early experiences shaped your interest in marine conservation, algae-based solutions, and sustainable materials?

*Answer:*

*For as long as I can remember, I've always held a love of the ocean. I've been really fortunate to have had some incredible experiences in the sea starting from an early age, which gave me an adoration of the ocean, and the marine life it holds. And yet, having grown up watching documentaries such as BBC's 'War on Plastics' and 'Blue Planet', and being surrounded by the growing environmental movement around me, I also was raised with the knowledge that my species was slowly destroying the ocean that I admired so much. This knowledge, like for so many others my age, gave me a climate anxiety, and a desperation to see more done about the threats to the oceans. I found a way to deal with that climate anxiety when I was eleven, as my brother Ashton (nine years old at the time) and I founded 'Hidden Plastic' in 2020. Hidden Plastic's goal has been to educate and encourage action against the dangers*



*of the lesser known or 'Hidden Plastics'. Originally, we started by creating videos about plastic pollution. Since then, we've released almost 50 videos, spoken to thousands of people, pitched seaweed-based solutions to companies such as Delta Airlines, and have been involved in the policy making space, where we've been to five UN environmental negotiations, including the Global Plastics Treaty, as some of the youngest delegates there. At 13, I also became a 'Seaweed Ambassador' for the Global Seaweed Coalition, which was a really exciting opportunity.*

## **Ocean Conservation & Hidden Plastic:**

2. Hidden Plastic focuses on raising awareness about microplastics and nanoplastics in our seas, air, and even in human blood. How has working on this campaign influenced the way you think about human impact on marine ecosystems, including the role algae play in ocean health, and what lessons have you learned about engaging communities on environmental issues?

*Answer:*

*For one, we've learned a lot about the scale of the plastic problem. When we first started 'Hidden Plastic' we knew about the obvious pollution such as plastic bags harming turtles, but soon discovered that to be just the tip of the iceberg. We found that plastics not only affect the entire food chain in the oceans, but can be found everywhere on the planet - and as they contain thousands of harmful chemicals, can seriously impact human health. We've also adopted what we call 'A solutions-based approach', where we focus on the solutions, as a way to educate others of the problem. We find that people are much more likely to be motivated to do something when they know how or that it's possible to solve it. One of those solutions, of course very prominent in our work, is seaweed!*



3. You've been exploring creative ways to use natural fibres and sustainable materials like seaweed in your projects and recipes. What inspired you to integrate algae into your artistic and culinary activities, and why do you see algae as a valuable resource for sustainability, environmental innovation, and educating others about the oceans?

*Answer:*

*From Hidden Plastic's 'solutions-based approach' we came across seaweed - and I fell in love with this organism, and its potential pretty instantly. From seeing a talk on 'The Seaweed Revolution' by Vincent Doumeziel (he later invited me to join the Global Seaweed Coalition as a 'Seaweed Ambassador') when I was thirteen, I discovered that all of the problems I was passionate about solving: plastic pollution, climate change, fast fashion, agriculture and malnutrition, could all be mitigated by this one group of organisms: seaweed. I really find it crazy that seaweed, with so much potential to create a better world, still holds the reputation of being slimy and gross to much of the world. I created 'SuperSeaweed' to help change that, and release recipes and video interviews - with the hope of helping to change seaweed's current reputation by showing people that seaweed doesn't have to be "slimy and gross", and of the many solutions it brings. The recipes especially seemed like a good step for this, because once people see how it can be used in cooking, and in their own lives, I believe they can be much more open to its use in other industries, such as sustainable fashion. As Hidden Plastic, my brother and I have also brought seaweed-based materials to the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations to show the solutions and to advocate for the support of solutions in policy, among other things. Seaweed really is such a wonderful organism, and I'm excited to watch this sector continue to grow!*

#### **Youth Leadership & Activism:**

4. Becoming a Junior PADI Open Water diver and running initiatives like Eco-wrap.org demonstrate remarkable ambition at a young age. How do you balance your creative, environmental, and scientific interests – including your



work with algae – and what motivates you to keep driving change for the oceans?

*Answer:*

*We were motivated to create Hidden Plastic because it served as a way for us to cope with our climate anxiety, as feeling like we were making an impact was better than just worrying about it and doing nothing. I've always wanted to do as much as I could to help the environment, which is still very much my goal. As young people, we find that people are surprisingly willing to listen to us because of our age. After all, it is our generation and the generations to come who will be most impacted by the climate crisis. This is really what led us to the policy space and environmental events, where we try to amplify the knowledge and expertise of others, as youth environmentalists. My brother and I really enjoy video making, and while attending these events, we also record video interviews with the people involved in providing solutions to the triple planetary crisis (such as our 'Heroes of Algae series'. It feels like one part of our work is what opens the door for another, seemingly entirely different part of our work to take place, and all of these things encompass our message and support our goal.*

### **Engaging Wider Audiences:**

5. Your initiatives often combine creativity, science, and activism – from artistic creations to educational campaigns. How do you think integrating algae-based projects or sustainable algae products helps make issues like hidden plastic more accessible, relatable, and inspiring to others, especially young people?

*Answer:*

*As previously mentioned, Hidden Plastic has a 'solutions-based approach'. So much of the time the media focuses on the problems, and is really good at creating climate anxiety in people (especially prominent in people my age), but fails to recognise the good news, or show others how they can meaningfully make an impact. My generation is especially impacted by climate anxiety, and many people my age actually give up on doing anything because of this. If*



*there's no signs of hope in their minds, then why would they bother? But whether we bury our heads in the sand or not, my generation will be inheriting, and have to face the climate crisis, and if we're more inspired to tackle it face on, then I think we can be much more effective in doing so. This is why solutions are so important. Because seaweed is both a good news story, and adopting its use is something basically anyone can be empowered to do, I feel that it's essential to raise awareness of its potential.*

### **Cross-Sector Collaboration & Impact:**

6. Through Hidden Plastic and SuperSeaweed.org, you engage with various communities and stakeholders. In your experience, how can collaborations between young activists, scientists, artists, and algae-focused initiatives like EU4Algae strengthen the impact of environmental campaigns?

*Answer:*

*I believe that for a problem as great as the climate crisis, we cannot work in isolation. We will all ultimately be affected by this issue, regardless of where we live, our knowledge or interests. In order to solve this problem, we need to collaborate and share our expertise, knowledge and the solutions we already have available in order to create a real impact. I've seen this happen in places like the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations and the Algae Awareness Summits, where people coming from entirely different spaces and sectors meet, and I've seen how incredibly valuable connections are made.*

### **Cultural & Personal Identity:**

7. Your creativity and love for the ocean are closely intertwined with your personal identity and values. How have your family, cultural experiences, or early inspirations shaped your commitment to environmental protection, algae-based solutions, and sustainable innovation?

*Answer:*



*I can't remember a time when I wasn't absolutely obsessed with the ocean. My parents always cultivated a deep appreciation of the sea in my brother and I, but didn't shelter me from the knowledge of the climate crisis. One of my earliest memories was of a family trip to Florida when I was about three years old, during what happened to be a red tide event. I can vividly recount seeing countless dead fish washed up on the beach, with an ocean stained red from an invasive algae. That image came back to me when I was seven, when during the research for a school report on algae I came across a mention of the red tides in Florida. The personal connection I had to that event, which I then learned has been made more severe from human activities, made the prospect of the climate crisis seem all the more real. As soon as I was old enough, my parents took me to dive, so I could see the fish in their habitats. When I was about eight, I decided I wanted to become a marine biologist, so that I could help protect the fish that I loved to see so much. I guess the obsession never stopped, because even today, the more I discover about the wonders of the ocean, and the threats it faces, the more I feel the determination to help protect it.*

### **Future Outlook:**

8. Looking ahead, what role do you hope to play in marine conservation, algae innovation, and sustainability? Are there future projects, collaborations, or personal goals – whether in diving, science, creative pursuits, or algae-related initiatives – that you're especially excited to explore?

*Answer:*

*I'm seventeen right now, so while finishing my last couple of years of high school, I plan to continue the work of 'Hidden Plastic' and 'SuperSeaweed'. We're especially focusing our work on the Global Plastics Treaty, which should have the final few negotiations within the next couple of years - and I'm trying to maintain a balance with schoolwork! Looking ahead, I definitely plan to dedicate my career to the conservation of the environment, especially our oceans, and believe that policy is one of the most effective ways to achieve this. I'd really like to be able to help make sure the correct policies are in place*



*to support solutions, such as those that seaweed provides, that help bring an end to plastic pollution. The environmental crisis is only going to become even more pressing when my generation inherits the world, but these challenges provide a chance for innovation and exciting new opportunities. And I believe so many of these solutions are already out there already, and just need the tools to succeed - especially seaweed!*

