



# Marine Debris

*Seas and oceans are home to thousands of species of marine life - so why do we use them as our dumping ground?*

*Marine debris is the name given to waste that finds its way into our seas and oceans. Plastics, rubber, metal, wood and glass can be found floating in our oceans or washed up on our beaches. Marine debris is not only a hazard to ships, divers and beach goers – it is also a threat to marine life.*

## Did you know?

- *Every day, ships throughout the world jettison 5.5 million items of waste into the sea.<sup>2</sup>*
- *Three times as much rubbish is dumped into the world's oceans annually as the weight of fish caught.<sup>2</sup>*
- *Every year an estimated 7 billion tonnes of rubbish enters the world's oceans.*
- *An eight metre Bryde's whale was found in QLD in 2000. An autopsy found that the whale's stomach was packed with six square metres of plastic.<sup>1</sup>*
- *Between 700,000 and 1 million seabirds are killed from entanglement or ingestion each year.<sup>1</sup>*
- *Under international law (MARPOL 73/78 Convention) dumping plastic waste at sea is prohibited. This is enforced in Australia with the Protection of the Sea, Act 1983.*

## The Problem

Marine debris is a global problem. Floating litter can travel significant distances, with regional and often global consequences.

As the world's waterways become more polluted we begin to feel the increased impact on land. More fish and shellfish are contaminated, species become rare or extinct, our beaches are dirty and ships are being damaged by floating debris.

### Threat to marine creatures

Plastic bags, bottles, ropes and nets trap, choke, starve and drown many thousands of marine animals and seabirds around the world each year. Worldwide, people have reported entanglement for over 143 marine species, including almost all of the world's sea turtles.<sup>1</sup>

### Ghost Fishing

Abandoned fishing equipment or 'ghost nets' can affect marine life for many years, trapping and killing not only fish, but marine mammals, seabirds and turtles before finally sinking to the sea bed where it creates more problems for coral and other plants and animals.

### Plastic

Plastic litter is one of the most common types of marine debris and can take up to 1,000 years to break down. In Australia, we produce about 1 million tonnes of plastic litter every year.

### Livelihood

Marine debris has the ability to affect the health and livelihood of coastal communities who rely on marine life as food. Tourism opportunities are also diminished in debris-affected areas.

### Other problems

Marine debris can also cause other threats to wildlife and ecosystems. These include destruction or smothering of the sea bed, accumulation of toxic substances, physical disturbances from mechanical beach cleaning and the transportation of invasive species.

## Where does Marine Debris come from?

There are two main sources of marine debris:

### Land-based

60-80% of marine debris originates directly from land sources. This includes debris from run-off, stormwater drains, air-borne debris and irresponsible disposal of rubbish by beach goers and campers.

### Ocean-based

This includes fishing lines and nets, offshore oil and gas rig/platform debris, merchant ship, ferry and cruise liner waste, recreational and tourist vessel garbage.

*Clean up - inspiring and working with all Australians to clean up, fix up and conserve our environment.*

# Help fight marine debris

*Our marine life and aquatic environments are precious. You can do your bit to ensure their survival by being more responsible with litter.*

## Start at home

- Always put your waste into bins and don't drop litter on the street. Litter on the street can wash into stormwater drains and eventually be deposited in the oceans.
- Recycle whenever possible.
- Make sure your garbage bin is securely fastened and nothing can be blown out by the wind.
- Never put oil or chemicals down the drain. Toxic materials will not only contaminate rivers and waterways but also make their way to the sea.
- If you live on the coast or near a waterway, join a local environmental group and get involved in a site clean up.

## Be responsible with plastic litter disposal

Plastics are the most common man-made objects sighted at sea<sup>2</sup> so be sure to dispose of plastic items correctly.

- If you are boating or fishing, bring your waste back with you and dispose of it thoughtfully on land. Avoid taking disposable items on board and remove all plastic packaging and dispose of it before you set off.
- Use biodegradable fishing equipment and bait bags.
- Take your rubbish home from the beach with you.
- Ask your local council and port authority for plastic disposal facilities

## Encourage awareness

Work with others to educate the community on marine debris.

## Join a Clean Up Australia beach or waterways site

Every year Clean Up Australia hosts Clean Up Australia Day in which communities across Australia work together to get rid of rubbish in their local area. There are many sites around the country at which you can make a real difference by removing marine debris from beaches, waterways and oceans.

## Report injured or dead marine animals

Contact your local National Parks and Wildlife Service if you discover an injured or dead marine animal.

## Participate in a marine debris study

Join with others in your community to monitor marine debris and contribute to national and international monitoring efforts. Further information can be found at [www.ephc.gov.au](http://www.ephc.gov.au)

## Dispose of Cigarette Butts thoughtfully

When it rains, cigarette butts lying in our streets and gutters are carried via stormwater directly into our harbours, beaches and rivers. The chemicals contained in these butts and the butts themselves impact on our water quality and can be deadly to marine life. Use a personal ashtray to dispose of butts - the simplest and cheapest solution is to reuse empty film canisters. For a more permanent option, you can purchase a specially designed portable ashtray from Butts Out<sup>3</sup>.



## References

<sup>1</sup> **Global Marine Litter Information Gateway**

<http://marine-litter.gpa.unep.org>

<sup>2</sup> **Australian Marine Conservation Society**

[www.amcs.org.au](http://www.amcs.org.au)

<sup>3</sup> **Butts Out**

[www.buttsout.net/australia](http://www.buttsout.net/australia)  
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