

Is Marine Debris An Issue In The Whitsundays?

The Whitsunday region is facing an extremely high risk from the negative consequences of marine debris as the islands protrude from the Queensland coastline and have many bays and beaches that are open to the south-east trade winds. The islands therefore act as a natural collection point for any marine debris that is introduced into coastal waters further south.

In addition, the high occurrence of marine-based activities in the area, careless throw-away behaviours and lack of adequate waste control measures within urban infrastructure all contribute to the occurrence of marine debris in the Whitsundays.



What Is Being Done About Marine Debris Locally?

Eco Barge Clean Seas Inc. is a not-for-profit environmental organisation that was established in the Whitsunday region to protect our precious marine life and aquatic environment by removing existing marine debris and reducing the amount of debris that enters our waterways.

We achieve this through the **Whitsunday Marine Debris Removal Program** by providing the opportunity for the community to become proactive in collecting marine debris from our beaches and coastline, while undertaking education and awareness concerning the issue of marine debris and promoting the importance of thoughtful waste disposal.

The Whitsunday Marine Debris Removal Program aims to be constant and on-going, with the regular removal of marine debris providing long-term protection for the iconic Whitsunday region.

Interested In Getting Involved?

We are always in need of volunteers and sponsors for the Whitsunday Marine Debris Removal Program.

We require **volunteer** involvement for a range of activities, including marine debris removal trips, counting and sorting the marine debris, family fun-days and other events, as well as Eco Barge working bees.

The Whitsunday Marine Debris Removal Program is also highly dependent on **sponsorship**. As a sponsor you will be provided with the knowledge that you are contributing to the wonderful marine environment of the Whitsunday region.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer or a sponsor you can register on our website.

www.ecobargecleanseas.org.au



WHAT IS MARINE DEBRIS?



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

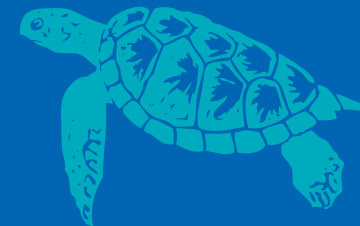


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What Is Marine Debris?

Marine debris is any rubbish that is washed, blown or disposed of into the marine and coastal environment.

Plastics are the most common type of marine debris, with most debris being related to what we consume – food and beverage products, as well as tobacco and other consumer goods.

Other significant categories of marine debris result from activities associated with marine transportation and shipping, fishing and manufacturing.

It is estimated that approximately 6.4 million tons of litter ends up in the world's oceans each year and that over 13,000 pieces of plastic litter are floating within every square kilometre of ocean

The types of marine debris are as varied as the products that we all use on a day to day basis, but all marine debris shares a common origin – **at a critical decision point, someone, somewhere, mishandled it and the rubbish either accidentally, thoughtlessly or deliberately ended up in the marine environment.**



Marine litter is one of the most threatening, but also the most solvable, pollution issue currently affecting the world's oceans and waterways

Should We Be Concerned About Marine Debris?

Dumping waste products in the ocean has been in practice for centuries, and while our habits may not have changed, the nature of marine debris is now dramatically different. Over the past 40 years organic materials have been replaced by synthetics like plastic that are durable and slow to degrade.

The very properties that make these materials so useful make them a serious problem for our marine environment as the slow rate of decomposition leads to a gradual, but significant, accumulation in the coastal and marine environment.

Marine debris can take many years to decompose in the marine environment. Plastic grocery bags take about 20 years, aluminium cans about 200 years, plastic bottles about 450 years and fishing line takes approximately 600 years

This is a serious problem because marine debris has a wide variety of negative impacts for humans, wildlife, sensitive aquatic habitats and the economic sustainability of coastal communities. Marine debris can cause:

- Entanglement that can result in restricted mobility, drowning, suffocation, strangulation and starvation through reduced feeding efficiency and other injuries.
- Ingestion problems caused by plastic bags, rubber balloons and plastic fragments being confused with prey, leading to internal injuries and starvation.
- Economic, health and aesthetic problems that can be responsible for large economic costs to communities through reduced tourism due to unattractive and potentially hazardous coastlines, declining water quality, a reduction in the abundance of economically important species and vessel damage.

Marine debris may remain near where it entered the marine environment or it may be transported over long distances by the ocean currents and winds. Marine debris is consequently an important issue requiring urgent global attention.

How Can We Prevent Marine Debris?

The most effective way to reduce the impacts of marine debris is to prevent it ever entering the marine environment.

With it estimated that 60 – 80% of marine debris originates from land based sources, we can all play a part in minimising this debris.

We produce about 1 million tonnes of plastic litter every year in Australia

Making sure that our rubbish is always disposed of into a bin will prevent land-based litter getting washed or blown into the marine environment.

We can also help by remembering the following:

REDUCE – try to reduce the amount of trash you produce by making an effort to purchase items with minimal packaging.

REUSE – try to focus on using items that are reusable rather than disposable.

RECYCLE - if you do use disposable items it is important to recycle as this reduces the amount of new items that need to be created.

It is estimated that Australians use 3.92 billion plastic bags a year – that is over 10 million bags being used every day!!

Marine debris is therefore more than just an environmental problem to be addressed by legislation. It is also a cultural problem with efforts being required to change attitudes, behaviours and management approaches.

