

## Marine Debris - Background Information

### What is it?

As defined by the UN Environmental Protection Program, 2009, marine debris is "any persistent, manufactured or processed solid material discarded, disposed of or abandoned in the marine or coastal environment". This includes materials such as plastics, food packaging, fishing nets, plastic bags, cigarette butts and fishing gear.

### The problem

Marine Debris is unfortunately, a serious problem not only in Australia but the world. Six million tonnes of rubbish finds its way into our oceans every year. It is estimated that around 18,000 pieces of plastic float through every square kilometre of our oceans. Some of this marine debris can take hundreds of years to biodegrade for example;

Fishing line - 600 years  
Plastic bottles - 450 years  
Aluminium cans - 200 years  
Disposable nappies - 450 years

Debris like plastic bags never completely breaks down.

This waste causes serious and significant impacts to our marine and bird life. 77 mammal species are affected by marine debris, this includes 20 endangered species. The danger for wildlife is not only becoming entwined but ingesting it as well. Many animals swallow plastic, confusing it with food. For seabirds plastic ingestion is likely to have its highest impact in the Tasman Sea because of the high number of seabirds and high density of plastic pollution.

**The good news is WE are doing something about it.**



## Plastic Police – Marine Debris Program

Conservation Volunteers are setting up a program that focuses on marine debris collection, recording and mapping in Tasmania.

Previous research suggests plastic ingestion for seabirds is likely to have its highest impact in the Tasman Sea. So it is our responsibility to do something about it!

Currently Tasmanian coasts have little in the way of marine debris data recording. This makes it difficult to track debris and also gauge the extent and significances of the problem.

The initial stages of the program will see a focus on the Tasman Peninsula, and the East Coast and then working our way further North. For each site the GPS coordinates will be captured and debris collected will be recorded including; type and amount. This data will assist in creating a coastal marine debris mapping system.

This program will allow us to improve the condition of our beaches, water quality and health of marine and bird life. The data collected helps to determine the type of debris while flagging 'hotspots' and tracking the origins of the debris.

Each clean-up will engage local community volunteers, this will see the issue of marine debris reach many people and thus help spread the word. The program will be promoted within the areas we are undertaking the clean-ups to help gain more awareness and see a continued effort to tackle this problem.

**Join our Plastic Police and help keep our oceans clean.**

To find out more Call 6231 1779 or email [Hobart@cva.org.au](mailto:Hobart@cva.org.au)

