

Plastic has become undoubtedly one of the greatest inventions of the 1950's. It is used in nearly everything we touch but for all the benefits plastic has given us, disposing of plastic, especially single use plastic such as packaging — has become a major environmental issue. The disposal, or rather the irresponsible disposal, of plastic is the real issue.

So how big is the problem? What happens once plastic goes into the ocean and what can we do about it?

Around eight million tonnes of plastic went into the ocean in 2010, and according to some scientific researchers, there will be more plastic in the ocean in 2050 than fish. The plastic is widespread in the open ocean but is particularly concentrated in the five major ocean gyres — rotating currents of water found in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans.



One of the problems of plastic in our oceans is animals becoming entangled in monofilament fishing line nets, plastic bags, balloons, and straps.

Research by Dr Wilcox from the CSIRO estimated that between 5,000 and 15,000 sea turtles are entangled each year by derelict fishing gear washing ashore in northern Australia alone. The second biggest issue is that as the plastic travels out to sea, it is ground down into small, hard cubes, which can be eaten by marine animals. It is estimated around 90 percent of sea birds, along with turtles, are eating this small plastic. The plastic can cause blockages of the gut or perforation of the intestines.

Much of the plastic that ends up in our waterways is roadside litter, thrown from cars or pedestrians. The items you see on the footpaths are washed down our drains and into our lakes creeks when it rains, eventually ending up in the Brisbane River and Moreton Bay, before finally making its way out into the Pacific Ocean.

Why not do an eco-friendly walk and pick up plastic items and place into the bins provided? When visiting the beach this summer, you could do a two minute beach clean and pickup any plastic litter you find. Proactive approaches such as these also teach our children to dispose of litter responsibly and to care for the environment today and for future generations.

Springfield Lakes Nature Care has a number of copies of the new children's picture book *Turtle Needs Help* for sale at \$10 each; the proceeds going to our group to pay for various on-going expenses. It would make an excellent Christmas present for children as it contains gorgeous watercolour illustrations of turtles, whales and the Great Barrier Reef. The rhyming text explains the lifecycle of a turtle hatchlings journey out into the ocean and looks at the issues of environmental impacts of plastic bags and marine debris. If you would like to purchase a copy, email your details to info@spirngfieldlakesnaturecare.org.au.