

# Marine debris – why does it matter?



Fishing line is a common killer for seals.

Credit: The Marine Mammal Center

Marine debris impacts the environment, economy, wildlife and human health and safety in many different ways.

## Animal victims

**Entanglement:** Derelict nets, fishing line, rope, packing bands, balloon string, six-pack rings and many other items can become dangerous traps for birds, dolphins, turtles, seals and other wildlife (**see below**). The animals get tangled, suffer physical deformities and injuries, suffocate or starve to death. Fishing nets can remain adrift for many years, killing countless creatures on their way.

Credit: D. Cayless/Marine Photobank; Dr J. McKenzie/EPA SA; NOAA



**Ingestion:** Whales and sea turtles amongst other animals mistake plastic bags for jelly fish (**below: left and centre**), and sea birds are attracted to colourful plastic fragments that they even feed to their young. With a false feeling of fullness they starve to death or die from internal injuries or blockages. When the animal decomposes the plastic in the guts is released and can kill again (**below: right**).

Credit: South Carolina United Turtle Enthusiasts; Karumbe Images; Chris Jordan



## Fast Facts

Scientists estimate that **between 5,000 and 15,000 turtles** have died from entanglement in debris in the Gulf of Carpentaria within the last few years.

**663 species** are affected by marine debris, including all sea turtle species, half of all mammal species and one-fifth of all sea bird species.

**On Lord Howe Island**, 90 per cent of sea-bird chicks were found to have plastic in their stomachs.

## Vessel Damage and Navigation Hazards

Marine debris can be dangerous for recreational boaters and commercial shipping. A collision with a large piece of underwater debris can sink small boats, and discarded nets and lines can entangle engines and propellers. Credit: NOAA



## Habitat Damage

Habitats are the basis of any ecosystem and their health is crucial for the survival of many species. But derelict fishing gear and other heavy debris can break or suffocate corals, and plants can be smothered by plastic bags or fishing nets. Since marine debris is more durable than natural modes of transport like drift-wood, it can function as a raft for invasive species to travel across the ocean to new shores where it can have a devastating impact on the local ecosystem.

## Economic loss

Marine debris is an eyesore along shore-lines and may cause economic loss if the area is a popular tourist destination. Often, beach clean-ups are too costly for coastal communities.



## Human health and safety

is affected when syringes, broken glass or toxic chemicals wash up on beaches.



AUSTRALIAN MARINE DEBRIS INITIATIVE



For more information or to get involved visit: [www.tangaroablue.org](http://www.tangaroablue.org)

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