

# What is marine debris?

Marine debris are man-made items that ended up in the marine environment through littering or dumping. It injures and kills marine wildlife, affects human health and coastal habitats and is a major pollution issue around the world.

## Where does it come from?

A variety of sources contribute to marine debris on our coastline: Near Australia's big cities most of the debris comes from the land: Litter gets washed down storm water drains during rain events, comes from overflowing sewage systems, is left behind by careless beach visitors or carried into the water by the wind. In remote areas sea-based debris is brought in on ocean currents from other countries, recreational boats, fisheries or cargo ships where it is either washed overboard or intentionally dumped into the ocean. *Credit: VictoriaM Marine Science*



## Where can you find it?

The debris that washes up on the coastline is only the tip of the iceberg, even though a whole beach can be covered in litter. The majority of debris is found in the ocean: Buoyant items such as most plastics float on the surface. Other items like fishing nets drift deeper in the water, and glass or metal sink to the sea floor. Most of the plastic accumulates in gyres, slow moving currents, similar to giant whirl pools. The largest garbage patch is at least the size of New South Wales. In those areas most of the plastic has broken up into tiny pieces and forms a "plastic soup" where it outnumbers plankton 6:1.



*Left: Tyre in a coral reef. Credit: NOAA*

*Right: The Gulf of Carpentaria is a cul-de-sac for ghost nets. Rangers pull one from the beach in Mapoon. Credit: Mapoon Land & Sea Rangers*



*Plastic bottles galore and even a TV cover this beach in Cape York. Credit: Tangaroa Blue Foundation*

## Fast Facts

Over **7 million tons of plastic litter** enter the ocean every year - 8 million pieces per day. This is three times as much rubbish as the annual weight of fish caught.

**In Australian waters**, you can find anything from a few thousand to more than 40,000 pieces of plastic per square kilometre.

**Objects of any size and shape** end up in the ocean. Toothbrushes, white goods, shoes, bottles, packaging, furniture, fishing gear, toys and much more have been found. About three quarters are plastics, often broken up into small fragments, and some almost invisible. Even the beads found in shower gels or exfoliating creams are plastic and get washed into the sea.

The **Top Ten** on Australian beaches are:

- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Plastic fragments | 6. Food packaging      |
| 2. Plastic lids      | 7. Plastic bags (bits) |
| 3. Cigarette butts   | 8. Broken glass        |
| 4. Insulation foam   | 9. Aluminium cans      |
| 5. Plastic bottles   | 10. Fishing line       |

*Credit: AMDI Database 2004-2014*



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[www.tangaroablue.org](http://www.tangaroablue.org)

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