Discovery 2: Harmful Marine Debris

Seabirds and marine animals are at risk from our rubbish. This rubbish that litters our coasts and oceans is called marine debris. There are two main sources of marine debris:
1. Land sourced EG beach litter and rubbish washed or blown into the sea via run-off and stormwater drains.
2. Ocean sourced EG fishing gear and rubbish tossed over the sides of boats and ships.

Our plastics become harmful marine debris as they float about the ocean. Plastic bags, bottles, synthetic ropes and nets trap, entangle, choke, starve, drown and are ingested by marine animals. Marine debris is a serious hazard for seabirds and animals.

There is a new government initiative that now makes harmful marine debris a ‘key threatening process’.

Did you know?

Under international law (MARPOL 73/78 Convention) the dumping of plastic waste at sea is prohibited. This is enforced in Australia with the ‘Protection of the Sea, Act 1983’:
- Ports and marinas are required to have waste disposal facilities.
- Vessels over 400 tons are required to keep a record book and to develop a waste management plan with procedures for collecting, storing, processing and disposal of garbage.
- All vessels over 12 metres are required to display information about garbage laws.
- Debris that may identify a ship can be reported to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.
- Fines of over a million dollars for companies and a quarter of million for individuals may be imposed on boat operators illegally dumping garbage at sea.

Find out more at Australian Maritime Safety Authority
www.amsa.gov.au


Play your part, it’s easy - BYO Bag

The government and retailers have agreed to work towards halving plastic bag use by the end of 2005 and cutting plastic bag litter by 75%. All you need to do is always take your own bag when you go shopping. Or you can get your groceries in a box then recycle or compost the cardboard. Why not put your shopping into a backpack or cloth bag, most things are already wrapped or in a box or container anyway. And better still reduce your plastic use by buying in bulk, choosing carefully and bringing your own containers to refill.

Play your part, it’s easy - Take all your fishing and boating rubbish home

Bring discarded fishing gear, bait bags, food and drink containers and any other rubbish home with you to dispose of properly. If you are out on the boat make sure it is in a secure place or a bin with a lid so nothing blows over the side. If you find others mess, then bring that home too.

For Marine Debris issues, information, actions and student activities visit AUSMEPA ‘Marine Pests and Threats Education Program’ at www.ausmepa.org.au