

**INQUIRY INTO WASTE AVOIDANCE AND RESOURCE
RECOVERY AMENDMENT (PLASTICS REDUCTION)
BILL 2021**

Organisation: Sea Shepherd Australia Limited
Date Received: 3 May 2021



Sea Shepherd Australia
2 Ann Street
Williamstown VIC 3016
australia@seashepherd.org.au
Tel: 1300 623 267

Portfolio Committee No. 7 - Planning and Environment
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

3rd May 2021

Dear Committee Members

Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Amendment (Plastics Reduction) Bill 2021

On behalf of Sea Shepherd Australia and our Marine Debris Campaign we thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in relation to the *Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Amendment (Plastics Reduction) Bill 2021* introduced into the NSW Parliament on 18th February 2021.

Sea Shepherd commends Ms Cate Faehrmann MLC, Chair of the NSW Upper House's Planning and Environment Committee for her willingness to introduce a mandatory framework into New South Wales to address the source of plastic waste and resulting pollution that is flowing into rivers and the ocean and harming wildlife at crisis levels.

With our concern for increasing plastic pollution and the need for ambitious legislation in this area, in May 2020, Sea Shepherd provided a submission and promoted with our supporters the NSW Government's consultation opportunity on *Cleaning Up Our Act: Redirecting the Future of Plastic in New South Wales*.

The coastline of NSW spans more than 1,900 kilometres and plays host to dynamic marine ecosystems which are home to an extraordinary range of species from plankton to marine turtles, Australian fur seals, sharks, Little penguins, fish, shore and sea birds to the majestic and much-loved Humpback whales.

Marine species across Australia are impacted by marine plastic pollution, leading to injury, starvation or death. In most areas 80% of all the debris comes from our cities and towns, which means it is in our hands to fix the problem. To clean up our oceans and rivers, we must clean up our actions.

Single-use plastic products are found almost everywhere in our environment and of course wherever they are found they can and do have an environmental impact. At best the impact is a visual one, and at worst causes damage and often a slow and painful death to wildlife. The impact is global and getting worse, not better.

With our oceans already drowning in plastic and the rate of production for cheap virgin plastic expected to double by 2030, plastic now requires a life cycle assessment approach by all stakeholders – from Government, to industry, business and consumers. It should not be left up to caring individuals, groups and communities to clean-up beaches and for wildlife carers to save marine life injured by marine plastic pollution.



Sea Shepherd Australia - Marine Debris Campaign

In February 2016, Sea Shepherd Australia responded to the growing issue of marine pollution by launching a dedicated nationwide Marine Debris Campaign. What started out as a few Sea Shepherd volunteers organising a beach clean-up at their local beach has grown into a movement of committed people working together at family-friendly community clean-ups around the country, including across NSW, to combat the growing tide of plastic and desire for a future with clean and healthy coastlines and oceans.

Through our citizen science program embedded in the Marine Debris Campaign, clean-ups don't just see the removal of trash but every item collected is sorted, counted and recorded on our national marine debris database which is publicly available.

Since 2016, Sea Shepherd has conducted over 800 clean-ups at beaches and rivers – in towns and cities in every State, to national and regional parks and even remote onshore and offshore locations including Moreton & Peel Islands (Qld), Northeast Arnhem Land (NT), Sandy Cape and Ningaloo (WA) and the Cocos Keeling Islands (IOT). Despite the challenges of the Pandemic, in 2020 our volunteers hosted 96 beach and river clean-ups.

Total campaign data from February 2016 - March 2021 is as follows:

- Over 5 million pieces of marine debris removed including 3.3 Million pieces of trash collected, sorted, counted and recorded
- Total No. of Australian clean-ups: 809
- Total weight of debris removed: 81 tonnes
- Over 31,000 members of the public have participated in a Sea Shepherd clean-up
- Bags of trash collected: 10,681
- Beach area cleaned: 598 kilometres

In NSW our Marine Debris Campaign is creating huge impacts to the NSW coastline and communities with established teams in Sydney, Newcastle, Central Coast, Coffs Harbour as well as clean-ups conducted as far north as Tweed to as far south as beaches along the NSW-VIC border.

The total impact from our NSW marine debris teams are as follows:

- 383,284 pieces of trash collected, sorted, counted and recorded
- Total No. of NSW clean-ups: 73
- Total weight of debris removed: 6.7 tonnes
- 2,754 members of the public have participated in a Sea Shepherd clean-up
- Bags of trash collected: 952

Nationally, on average 79% of debris removed at a Sea Shepherd clean-up comprises plastic, however at our NSW clean-ups there is a higher average – **86%** of all the 383,284 pieces of debris removed is plastic. This quantifies that NSW has an elevated problem with plastic pollution, more so than other states.

Through hosting beach clean-ups, Sea Shepherd is playing an important role in creating opportunities for the entire community to take action and raise awareness of the crisis of ocean plastic pollution.

Plastic consumer items and packaging items featured high on the list of categories at all NSW clean-ups. Too many of these items are single-use and all of them are problematic in the environment.



Top Ten Items Removed at Sea Shepherd Australia Community Clean-ups in New South Wales:

1. Cigarette butts & filters	124,134
2. Plastic bits & pieces hard & solid	58,168
3. Plastic packaging food (wrap, packets, containers)	39,336
4. EPS Foam insulation & packaging (whole & remnants)	37,092
5. Plastic film remnants (bits of plastic bag, wrap etc)	22,824
6. Straws, confection sticks, cups, plates & cutlery	11,828
7. Glass or ceramic broken	10,842
8. Paper & cardboard packaging	10,069
9. Plastic drink bottles (water, milk, juice soft drink)	7,741
10. Lids & tops, pump spray, flow restrictor & similar	6,448

Please refer to Attachment A for the full yearly database from our NSW clean-ups to the end of March 2021.

The results of our monthly community beach clean-ups, which have consistently removed thousands of single-use plastic items at each event, clearly demonstrates the need for bans and action on single-use and problematic plastics. It is therefore absolutely imperative that all sectors of society must come together to reduce these environmentally destructive items if we are to make any progress going forward.

Clean-up Costs & Benefits

Every person involved in a Sea Shepherd community beach clean-up has volunteered their time. Picking up marine debris – macro or micro items - whether at an urban or remote beach is labour intensive.

Below we provide the following snapshot of the conservative economic cost (and benefit to the broader Australian community) of Sea Shepherd hosted community clean-ups in Australia through our Marine Debris Campaign from February 2016 to March 2021:

No. of Sea Shepherd Australia Community Clean-ups in NSW	73
No. of Volunteers	2,754
Average Volunteer Hours	2
Wage Rate (at Minimum Wage)	\$19.49
TOTAL COST	\$107,350 *

**Calculated conservatively at No. of Volunteers x 2 hrs = 5,508 hours X \$19.49 /hr (Minimum Wage Rate in Australia). This amount excludes incidental event management and admin costs (borne by Sea Shepherd) and waste disposal costs (borne by local government authority or state government agency).*

The 800+ beach clean-ups have been hosted and run by Sea Shepherd to benefit both the marine environment and local communities. Our volunteers say they would much rather be enjoying the beach

but the alternative to do nothing is not an option. Through beach clean-ups, and our process to sort and count the rubbish, the visual display large amounts of trash provides awareness and is an educational tool.

Feedback - Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Amendment (Plastics Reduction) Bill 2021

Sea Shepherd recognises the NSW Government's ambition to be part of the global solution to plastic pollution to prevent long-term impacts. However, NSW is well behind other States and the ACT in developing State legislation on problematic plastics including the light-weight plastic bags.

We welcome Ms Faehrmann's for introducing the Private Members Bill on plastics in the form of the *Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Amendment (Plastics Reduction) Bill 2021*.

We support the following actions detailed in the Bill:

- Action to prevent microfibre pollution by introducing filters on washing machines
- Action to eliminate problematic single-use plastics – plastic shopping bags, single-use plastic cutlery, plastic drinking straws, disposable plastic cups, expanded polystyrene packaging, and other packaging such as fruit and vegetable packaging
- Action to ban microbeads in personal care products and detergents
- Action to eliminate plastic pellet pollution
- Establishment of a Plastics Reduction Commission
- Mandatory State targets for plastic pollution reduction by 2025
- 100% reusable, recyclable or compostable packaging by 2024
- Banning of balloons made of plastic
- Banning non-compostable cigarettes

Sea Shepherd Australia also provides the following additional feedback to the Committee for consideration:

- If established, the Plastics Reduction Commission to also include other stakeholders such as environmental / conservation groups. These stakeholder groups to be consulted during the gathering of information on the sources and impact of plastics pollution in NSW.
- In addition to banning non-compostable single-use plastic items listed in the Bill, we urge the Committee to consider phasing out the following:
 - Fruit and vegetable barrier(produce) bags
 - Plastic balloon sticks, plastic balloon attachments (clips, cups, discs and ribbons) and all balloon releases due to the harm they can cause to wildlife
 - Non-compostable wet wipes which are marketed as flushable
 - Plastic bait bags – environmentally friendly alternatives are available
 - Glitter containing any form of plastic including bioplastic.
- Any compostable alternatives that replace single-use plastic products in NSW should be required to meet the Australian compost standards for this type of packaging (AS 4736-commercial AS 5810-home).

- Penalties for littering and illegal dumping should be significantly increased – Bill currently does not include any penalties for non-compliance.
- Develop and introduce consistent standards for plastic beverage containers that have single-use parts, like bottle caps.
- Recreational fishing: Amend NSW rules to ensure that rods and fishing lines must be attended due to the impacts to sea birds and marine life resulting from entanglement and hook/line injuries.
- Increased educational and initiatives and funding to engage the community:
 - Further expanding existing educational initiatives and programs such e.g. Don't be a Tosser! Campaign and the Return and Earn container deposit scheme. Create capacity building grants to community and environmental groups/organisations to deliver engagement programs or initiatives.
 - Increased funding to create and promote local education about the environmental impacts of plastics and expand litter prevention programs to reduce plastic litter. Sea Shepherd would be happy to provide the NSW Government with our local collection results to demonstrate localized impacts of plastics.
 - Funding to provide educational signage in multiple languages at known recreational fishing hotspots on the environmental impacts of plastic, particularly related to problem fishing gear. Ban the use of balloons in fishing due to the impact on sea and shore birds and marine life.
 - Increase the diversity of signage at popular beaches highlighting the impacts of plastics in our oceans, encouraging beachgoers to take their rubbish home or face hefty fines.
- Expand investment in infrastructure and initiatives to support increasing the number of public water bubbler / water stations to reduce prevalence of single-use plastic water bottles in the environment.
- In addition to considerations in, we recommend amending the Smoke-free Environment Act 2000 to ban smoking on ALL foreshores and beaches in NSW. Two-thirds of the 5.6 trillion cigarettes made with a plastic filter (cellulose acetate) are dumped irresponsibly and butts are the No.1 item littered in Australia. At our beach clean-ups along across the NSW coastline our volunteers have removed 124,134 cigarette butts. Butts leach toxic chemicals into the environment and are harmful to marine life, land animals and humans.
- We support mandatory Extended Producer Responsibility schemes to ensure that producers of the most littered items and also most harmful to marine life are responsible for and contribute to clean-up costs. Examples include cigarette companies, given cigarette butts are the number one item littered in NSW and nationally and producers of plastic fishing gear to manage the cost of lost and abandoned plastic fishing gear arriving onshore and removed offshore. This is in line with Single Use Plastics Directive of the European Union and is a key element towards Europe's transition towards a circular economy, and contribute to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals.

We call on the Committee and the NSW Parliament to urgently implement ambitious directives against plastics that are responsible for polluting our rivers and oceans, impacting marine wildlife, ecosystems and even the water and food we consume. With a conservative estimate that 44% of marine mammals, 86% of sea turtles and up to 90% of seabirds having plastic in their guts, every piece of plastic and trash we stop from entering the ocean is a potential life saved.

We urge the Committee to not make this political, with plastics impacting our marine life, our ocean and ultimately our own health and wellbeing. In this climate emergency, one of the first things we must do is protect our ocean, for the healthier they are, the greater they stand a chance in fighting climate, and given most of the air we breathe comes from our ocean, ultimately they are our primary life support. In short putting our oceans first, is putting humanity first.

We ask the Committee to represent the children of planet earth, our home, and put forth ambitious directives against plastics. In doing so you will be applauded for standing on the right side of history.

We look forward to hearing of the results of this Inquiry.

Yours faithfully

Jeff Hansen
Managing Director
Sea Shepherd Australia



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