

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

Organisation: NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service Inc.
(WIRES)

Date Received: 5 May 2021



NSW WILDLIFE
INFORMATION
RESCUE AND
EDUCATION
SERVICE Inc.

The Director
Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

28 April 2021

RE: Submission to Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Amendment (Plastics Reduction) Bill 2021

To the Chair and Committee Members,

NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service Inc. (WIRES) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Amendment (Plastics Reduction) Bill 2021 and its potential impact on our native wildlife and their habitat.

WIRES is Australia's largest wildlife rescue organisation and was formed in 1985. Thirty-five years later, WIRES has 28 branches, more than 3,500 members and assists hundreds of thousands of community members annually. WIRES mission is to actively rehabilitate and preserve Australian wildlife and inspire others to do the same. WIRES dedicated Rescue Office operates 365 days a year, acting as the first point of contact for the community to provide wildlife information, education, emergency rescue advice and assistance for sick, injured and orphaned native animals. We receive over 180,000 calls to our 1300 number annually, including thousands of interstate calls. In the last financial year, WIRES provided rescue advice and assistance for over 100,000 animals. On average, WIRES provides up to 80% of all wildlife rescue and care in NSW and plays an important role in national community wildlife education.

In addition, WIRES trains hundreds of new volunteers in wildlife rescue and care annually. Over 1,800 people registered for introductory training in 2020 alone and we are dedicated to the ongoing recruitment of new volunteers and the continued training of existing volunteers. This growing network of volunteer rescuers and carers is critical for the rescue and rehabilitation of our unique native wildlife.

After the catastrophic bushfires of Summer 2019-2020, where an estimated three billion animals perished or were displaced, we recognise that we are no longer operating under a 'business as usual' approach. In New South Wales alone, approximately 7% (5.37 million hectares) of land was burnt. This included 37% of the national park estate, 42% of state forests and 4% of freehold land¹. With this new reality and so much of our natural bushland lost, it is crucial that we review how native species are protected and managed in Australia, particularly as such extreme events are only predicted to increase under climate change over the coming decades.

WIRES supports the protection and welfare of native wildlife and many of our carers witness first-hand the impacts of single-use plastic debris on animals, particularly marine animals, as they are called on to assist injured wildlife. We see the introduction of this bill as a positive step by the NSW Government towards reducing the impact of plastic waste on our native wildlife, and hope this demonstrates the beginning of broader commitments to wildlife protection. Particularly as every other state in Australia has already taken this step forward.

¹ State of New South Wales and Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. 2020. NSW Fire and the Environment 2019–20 Summary. Environment, Energy and Science Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.



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Impacts of Plastic Pollution on Native Species

From 2017-2020 WIRES saw a 246% increase in turtle rescues, with 83 turtles in 2020. Marine birds and reptiles are at increasing risk of dying from plastic, with an estimated 90% of seabirds around the world consuming plastic annually². In Australia, approximately 130,000 tonnes of plastic leaks into the marine environment each year³. Banning single-use plastics is a step forward in protecting our native wildlife from their damaging presence in the environment.

Single-use plastics have a damaging effect on native wildlife, as items ranging from plastic cutlery to larger plastic bags often end up in the environment where they are consumed by wildlife or become entangled around feet, wings, necks and heads. Plastic does not easily break down in the guts of animals and can leave them unable to consume normal food because their stomachs are full, block their airways and cause damage to their gastro-intestinal tracts⁴. Animals that accidentally eat plastic suffer and often die as a result of it.

Wildlife in urban areas are particularly vulnerable to plastic entanglements. Plastic makes up a significant portion of land-based pollution. For instance, recently one of our rescuers attended a call in Sydney's inner west for an Australian white ibis with a plastic bag attached to its wing and one of its feet. A member of the public was able to remove the bag, but called WIRES as the bird's leg appeared injured and was impeding its movement. Many wildlife like this ibis are left vulnerable by the long-term impacts of their plastic entanglements, leaving them with injuries that severely impact their ability to look for food and shelter, and escape predators. Many birds lose legs or feet, small mammals and reptiles are often found stuck in plastic drink rings or choking on plastic bottle caps.

Plastic takes decades to break down in the environment and current pollution levels will continue to have a harmful impact long into the future. NSW remains the last state or territory in Australia to place a ban on single-use plastics, alarmingly putting us far behind the rest of the country. Lightweight plastic bags are currently banned in every state except for NSW⁵. All government state and territories except for NSW, NT and Tasmania have announced commitments to banning certain single-use plastics within the next 2-3 years. With the introduction of the National Plastics Plan 2021 by the Australian Federal Government, it is time for NSW to join the rest of the states and territories in taking control of single-use plastic pollution.

Impacts on Wildlife Carers

In April 2021 WIRES opened enrolments for a new Sea Turtle Rescue Course, available to WIRES members, to provide specialist training exploring the safe methods of rescuing and transporting injured and/or sick sea turtles. Carefully designed by our training team to improve rehabilitation capacity and emergency rescue response, we had over 240 enrolments in the first 24 hrs of this course opening. This demonstration of enthusiasm represents a broad recognition of the need for sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation, in response to our increasing numbers of injured and sick sea turtles being identified by members of the public and our rescue office.

One of the most recognisable reasons turtles end up in rehabilitation facilities is because of plastic entanglements. Sea turtles often mistake floating garbage for food, which can cause them to choke, sustain internal injury or starve. Research by CSIRO Australia on records of 1000 deceased turtles, many from Australian beaches, showed that once a turtle had consumed just one piece of plastic it had a 22% chance of dying and consuming 14 pieces of plastic increased its mortality to 50%⁶.

² WWF (2018). "How many birds die from plastic pollution." Accessed 28 April 2021 <https://www.wwf.org.au/news/blogs/how-many-birds-die-from-plastic-pollution#gs.ztx4b0>

³ World Wide Fund For Nature Australia and Boston Consulting Group. (2020) *Plastics Revolution to reality - A roadmap to halve Australia's single-use plastic litter*. <https://www.bcg.com/en-au/plastic-revolution-to-reality>

⁴ Plasticoupfoundation.org. Accessed 29 April 2021 <https://www.plasticoupfoundation.org/en/>

⁵ AMCS (2021). *Which Australian states are banning single use plastics*. Report March 2021.

⁶ Wilcox et al. (2018). A quantitative analysis linking sea turtle mortality and plastic debris ingestion. *Scientific Reports*: 8:12536.





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All rehabilitated wildlife are released by our carers with the best hopes for their survival, however every animal released still faces the significant risk of plastic entanglement or consumption. WIRES therefore strongly supports the mitigation of harmful impacts on the environment such as plastics.

WIRES encourages the banning of single-use plastics in New South Wales, and hopes that the development of this amendment bill represents a growing commitment to conserving our precious native wildlife in to the future.

Your sincerely



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