

Submission  
No 89

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

**Organisation:** Australian Marine Conservation Society

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03 May 2021

TO: The Director, Portfolio Committee 7,  
Parliament House,  
Macquarie Street,  
Sydney NSW 2000.

## **Submission to the Inquiry into the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Amendment (Plastics Reduction) Bill 2021**

The Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) is the leading charity devoted solely to caring for Australia's oceans and their wildlife. AMCS has over 250,000 members and supporters in Australia who we represent and work with on key marine issues facing the nation. We work with science and conservation centres to support solutions that use best available science to deliver healthier outcomes for our oceans. One of our core focus areas is addressing the ocean plastic pollution crisis.

AMCS welcomes the proposed legislation to ban dangerous single-use plastics such as plastic bags, drinking straws, balloons and cutlery – commonly polluted plastics found to harm ocean wildlife. If such a proposal is implemented NSW will join South Australia, Queensland and the ACT as leaders in tackling the scourge of plastic killing Australian marine wildlife.

## **The harm plastic causes for marine wildlife**

Plastic pollution continues to flow into Australia's oceans at an alarming rate, entangling and suffocating or starving marine wildlife. Whales are washing up on our beaches dead, with stomachs full of plastic. Turtles are dying from entanglement, maiming or starvation caused by plastic pollution. Urgent action is required to end the shocking deaths of vulnerable marine animals.

Best available research indicates there is already over 150 million tonnes of plastics in the oceans already, and that there will be more plastic than fish in our oceans by 2050 unless action

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is taken today.<sup>1</sup> Millions of seabirds die from ingesting plastic pollution each year, and over 100,000 marine animals as well.<sup>2</sup> Half of all seabirds and turtles have plastic in their stomachs.<sup>3</sup>

While most Australians care about our beautiful beaches and our iconic marine animals, recycling efforts have failed to stem the tide of plastic pollution flowing into our oceans. Waste recovery and recycling is essential but it is only one part of the solution. With safer, non-toxic products available we have the opportunity to phase out the most dangerous plastics and clean up our oceans.

## Feedback on the Proposed Bill

AMCS supports the prohibition of the single-use plastic products that pose the greatest threats to our marine wildlife. Single-use plastic pollution cannot be contained without arresting the supply of unnecessary or dangerous plastics.

**A recent international IPSOS ‘Throwaway World’ poll on attitudes to single use plastics found that 69% of Australians favoured a ban on single use plastics as soon as possible.<sup>4</sup>**

We note the recent commitments made by the NSW Environment Minister at the virtual meeting of National Environment Ministers on 15 April 2021, which included a commitment to support a phase-out of lightweight plastic bags; plastic products misleadingly termed as ‘degradable’; plastic straws; plastic utensils and stirrers; expanded polystyrene (EPS) consumer food containers (e.g. cups and clamshells); EPS consumer goods packaging (loose fill and moulded); and microbeads in personal health care products.

If passed, this bill would meet these commitments and deliver a vast reduction in plastic pollution leaking into Australia’s oceans via the NSW waste stream.

We commend the comprehensive approach that the proposed legislation takes to eliminating a wide range of single-use plastics lethal to ocean wildlife. If enacted, these laws would create consistency with South Australia, Queensland and the ACT, by banning the same items they have identified for prohibition - including:

- single-use plastic cutlery,
- single-use plastic straws and drink stirrers,
- plastic cups, plates and bowls,
- polystyrene products such as cups, bowls, plates and clam-shell containers, and
- plastic fruit & vegetable barrier bags.

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<sup>1</sup> World Economics Forum. (January 2016). *The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics*. Access at: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_The\\_New\\_Plastics\\_Economy.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_New_Plastics_Economy.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO (2017). Facts and Figures on Marine Pollution.

<sup>3</sup> Schuyler, Q.A., Wilcox, C., Townsend, K.A., Wedemeyer-Strombel, K.R., Balazs, G., van, Seville, E. and Hardesty, B.D. (2016), Risk analysis reveals global hotspots for marine debris ingestion by sea turtles. *Glob Change Biol*, 22: 567-576. doi:[10.1111/gcb.13078](https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.13078)

<sup>4</sup> Ipsos. (19 November 2019). *A Throwaway World: the challenge of plastic packaging and waste*. <https://www.ipsos.com/en/throwaway-world-challenge-plastic-packaging-and-waste>

We also commend the bill for including other single-use plastics for prohibition, such as balloons containing plastic, plastic ring carriers, heavyweight plastic bags and polystyrene packaging. If implemented, these laws would raise the bar for all states and territories, firmly establishing NSW as Australia's leader in the fight against lethal ocean plastic pollution and in the transition to a sustainable circular economy.

**We also support the proposed inclusion of oxo-degradable plastics in the list of prohibited products, commensurate with states such as South Australia who have committed to eliminate this dangerous plastic.**

An ACCC ruling in 2019 found that these products are not compostable. There is no evidence that these products decompose, instead breaking up into smaller pieces that are easily ingested by marine life. They should not be permitted in recycled or compostable plastic products.

If the Government plans to allow compostable alternatives, these should be required to meet the Australian compost standards for this type of packaging (AS 4736-commercial composting or AS 5810-home composting).

**The Australian Marine Conservation Society urges the parliament to act with urgency to implement these laws and prohibit these problematic plastics, bringing a ban on single-use plastics into effect in 2021.** Available replacement products currently exist on the market. As such, we believe 6 months is sufficient time to allow for transition.

## Concluding Remarks

Tackling the ocean plastics pollution crisis is an opportunity, and an obligation. Public appetite for action has never been greater. We encourage the committee to endorse this bill and use this opportunity to save Australia's marine life, ensuring every Australian can enjoy the privilege of healthy oceans for generations to come.

**Shane Cucow**

Plastics Spokesperson

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