

Waste Free Oceans: Leading the fight against Marine plastics

In February 2017 the UN hosted its Ocean Conference in Bali, Indonesia; the UN addressed the growing global concern of marine plastics on our ocean environments. Speaking at the event, Erik Solheim, head of UN Environment, raised attention to the fact that “Plastic pollution is surfing onto Indonesian beaches, settling onto the ocean floor at the North Pole, and rising through the food chain onto our dinner tables”, leakage of plastic waste into our environment “must stop”. Similar calls have been made by politicians, including the European Parliament, and celebrities alike such as Sir Richard Branson and Adrian Grenier.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation raised attention to the fact¹ that eight million metric tonnes of plastic waste leaks into our oceans every year, equivalent to one garbage truck dumping its load each minute. If nothing is done, there will be one tonne of plastic for every 3 tonnes of fish by 2025, and by 2050 there will be more plastic waste in our oceans than fish.

Marine plastics of concern include single use plastics such as plastic packaging (e.g. plastic packets, bottles and plastic bags) and micro-plastics found in most cosmetics. Most marine plastics enter the oceans through improper disposal, mostly caused by a lack of public awareness of the associated impacts: approximately one in four people do not pay attention to how much disposable plastic they use!²



Common plastic waste collected from marine environments includes plastic packaging (bottles, packets etc) and discarded fishing nets
[Image taken at WFO event in Kerval, France July 2016]

¹ Study by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, entitled “The New Plastics Economy: Catalysing action”

² Moore, T. (Feb 2017) Sky Ocean Rescue: How to get involved, available from:

<http://news.sky.com/feature/sky-ocean-rescue-10734494>

The impacts of these marine plastics on our marine ecosystems are clear: we have all seen images and videos of turtles and dolphins being entangled in discarded fishing nets and plastic packaging; leading to injury, strangulation and sometimes even death. Additionally, certain plastics can contain harmful chemicals such as flame retardants, Bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates which have been found to be potential carcinogens even at low doses. When they work their way through the food chain they have the potential to harm consumers of fish products.

Clearly, the amount of plastic leaking into our oceans needs to be reduced, as well as the debris present in our oceans today. Another growing concern is that as more plastic waste leaks into our environment, the waste that thereby goes unrecycled requires more resource extraction to produce new plastic products. The environmental impacts associated with extraction and production are evident in land degradation and rising greenhouse gases.

The Waste Free Ocean Foundation is leading the way in addressing both of these concerns.

Waste Free Oceans - Bio

Waste Free Oceans (WFO) is a ground breaking, public-private foundation whose main goal is to reduce the global impacts of marine litter, especially marine plastics. By mobilising fisheries, recyclers, manufacturers and policy makers, their aim is to **reduce, recycle and ultimately reuse** marine litter; reducing impact on both our environment and natural resources.

Founded in 2011 as an initiative of the European Plastics industry to address the growing concern of marine plastics, WFO has since grown into an independent organisation which operates worldwide.

WFO's main operations include conducting marine litter clean-ups using special fishing trawls which can each collect 6-8 tonnes of floating litter; policy advocacy including presenting and holding forums at the European Parliament and Commission, and collaborating with partners on "closing the loop" projects designed to **recycle and reuse collected marine litter to produce new innovative products**. Deep-rooted connections within the Plastics and Recycling sectors allow the WFO to bring together companies, recyclers and plastic producers together in order to produce sustainable products made from marine plastics.

Waste Free Oceans relies on funding from public donations, project collaborations and corporate partnerships. Public supporters include current WFO champion and chairman of the EU Parliament fisheries committee Alain Cadec MEP, former EU Commissioner Maria Damanaki and EuPC managing director Alex Dangis. WFO is actively partnering with the WWF, plastic manufacturers and recyclers, and companies wanting to produce green packaging.



Previous projects have included marine clean-ups in Lebanon, Holland and France, launching “Plastian the Little Fish”: a children’s book highlighting the impact of plastics on marine environments, and partnering with ECOVER to collect, recycle and reuse marine plastics to produce new plastic bottles. In 2017, WFO will be a founding member of “Rio Coalicion” which aims to restore the Ozama and Isabela rivers in the Dominican Republic, as well as partnering with WWF Hong Kong to conduct marine litter clean-ups and piloting new, environmentally friendly fish boxes. The WFO is currently in the process of planning and seeking partners for a project which would involve the clean-up of life jackets and inflatables left by refugees in Lesbos, Greece in order to recycle and reuse them to produce new products such as clothing and bags.



Bottle made from recycled litter, produced by collaboration of WFO and Ecover in 2014.

Waste Free Oceans aims to take advantage of this growing call to action by providing proven solutions to addressing the issue of marine plastic, both on our ocean environments and our exploitation of natural resources.

To find out more about the WFO their website is www.wastefreeoceans.org, where you can find out more about the work they do and how you can get involved in reducing the impacts of marine plastics. Any enquiries can be sent to contact@wastefreeoceans.org.



Fishing boat fitted with special trawl which collects 6-8 tonnes of floating litter
[Image taken at WFO event in Kerval, France July 2016]