

Microplastics bad for bay

Tiny plastic pieces a huge threat to ecosystem

NEIL BLAKE
PORT PHILLIP BAYKEEPER

In 2017, 193 countries signed a United Nations resolution to eliminate plastic pollution from oceans.

Plastics in waterways adsorb chemicals which bioaccumulate and biomagnify up the food chain.

Increasing concentration of toxins in tissues of organisms at successively higher levels in a food chain has been linked to disease and death in top predators.

Port Phillip Bay is especially at risk due to the extensive stormwater drainage system in its 10,000sq km catchment area.

Between January 2015 and October 2017, with State Government support, Port Phillip EcoCentre and Yarra Riverkeeper Association conducted trawls for microplastics in the Maribyrnong

and Yarra rivers.

The trawls indicated over 828 million litter items flow into the bay annually from the rivers' surface waters — over 612 million (74 per cent) of these are microplastics (5mm or less in size).

Despite efforts of councils and organisations such as BeachPatrol, Bellarine Catchment Network, Tangaroa Blue and Sea Shepherd, to remove litter from beaches, the problem remains.

Solutions must be found at the source: in the suburbs.

EcoCentre is working with Scouts Victoria to conduct regular street litter audits (including microplastics) to gather evidence for reduction strategies; and the Love Our Street movement is catching on. Locals banding together to take pride in their neighbourhood!

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Neil Blake is encouraging people to rid the streets and beaches of microplastics.

Picture: Valeriu Campan

Plastic found in human poo

A study of human poo from around the world has found evidence of microscopic plastic particles.

Eight participants from the UK, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia and Austria kept a food diary for a week before having their stools sampled.

The diaries showed each person was exposed to plastic by consuming plastic-wrapped food or drinking from plastic bottles.

None were vegetarian and six ate sea fish.

Lead researcher Dr Philipp Schwabi, from the Medical University of Vienna in Austria, said: "While the highest plastic concentrations in animal studies have been found in the gut, the smallest microplastic particles are capable of entering the blood stream, lymphatic system and may even reach the liver."

"Now that we have first evidence for microplastics inside humans, we need further research to understand what this means for human health."

On average, the scientists found 20 microplastic particles in every 10 grams of stool.

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