

Northern Territory Marine Debris Monitoring

Why monitor debris?

In Australia, and throughout the world, marine debris has been identified as a major threat to marine animals such as turtles, whales, dugongs, sharks and sea-birds.

Animals can either ingest debris or become entangled. Knowledge of marine debris and its impacts is critical to ongoing efforts to reduce the amount of debris in our oceans.

To gain an understanding of marine debris, NRETA, in partnership with local indigenous communities, is scientifically monitoring beach debris at established sites on the Tiwi Islands, Cobourg Peninsula, Elcho Island, Cape Arnhem, Blue Mud Bay, Groote Eylandt and Vanderlin Island (Borroloola region). The overall goal of the NT Marine Debris Monitoring Program is to determine long-term trends in marine debris, and its impacts, in northern Australian waters.



Flatback turtle killed by a discarded fishing net. Photo courtesy of Conservation Volunteers Australia.



Photo courtesy CVA



K. Edyvane (NRETA)

Examples of marine debris in the NT

Aims of the program

The marine debris project builds on the extensive work of WWF Australia and aims to develop a better understanding of the complex problem of marine debris and its impacts, to monitor ongoing trends, and to support indigenous land and sea management. The specific aims are:

- ◆ To monitor trends in the quantity, composition, sources and wildlife impacts of marine debris washing ashore on the Northern Territory coastline.
- ◆ To provide ongoing scientific data to assist managers and policy developers to tackle the problem of marine debris and wildlife impacts.
- ◆ To improve the capacity of coastal, regional indigenous communities to monitor and survey marine debris.



K. Edyvane (NRETA)

Fishing net washed up on Cape Arnhem.

How are the surveys done?

Marine debris surveys are conducted on selected sandy beaches, preferably with a clear, unobstructed position facing the open ocean. Participants walk in a line between the high water mark and the shoreline and collect all marine debris items larger than 9cm² (about the size of a bottle top), including fishing debris, such as nets, buoys, ropes. Any entangled or stranded wildlife are also recorded. Sorted items are identified, counted, weighed, recorded, and disposed of responsibly away from the site at a local land fill.

What is done with the survey results?

Survey reports (and all data collected) are provided back to communities and sea ranger groups after each survey.

In consultation with communities:

- ◆ Joint media releases will be prepared to communicate survey results with interested groups.
- ◆ Project progress will be reported in the newsletters and websites of the project partners (ie. communities, NRETA, WWF, CVA) and funding agencies (government, NRM).
- ◆ Scientific results will be published and presented at conferences, acknowledging all project partners.
- ◆ Results will be used to assist with a broader marine education program (pamphlets, media, posters, Community Service Announcements, seminars).



Bathurst Island

Links with the Ghost Nets program

The Carpentaria Ghost Nets Program (www.ghostnets.com.au) is mainly concerned with the collection and disposal of nets and the rescue of entangled marine wildlife within the Gulf of Carpentaria. The NT Marine Debris Monitoring program is complementary to the Ghost Nets program, focussing on scientifically monitoring trends in marine debris composition, origin and wildlife impacts.

Marine debris monitoring sites



Project partners



WWF



Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation



Department of Environment & Heritage



Tiwi Land Council



Laynhapuy Rangers



Anindilyakwa Rangers



Marthakal Homeland Resource Centre



Lianthawirryarra Sea Rangers



Conservation Volunteers Australia

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