

Marine litter: a problem that refuses to go away!

Introduction

Marine litter or debris is widespread. Plastic in particular contaminates habitats from the poles to the equator and has been reported on shorelines, at the sea surface, in the water column and in the deep-sea. Around 700 species are known to encounter marine debris; in many cases this results in physical harm or death. Yet the societal benefits that plastics bring can be realised without the need for emissions of plastic debris to the environment. Solutions are at hand, but require us to rethink our production, use and disposal of plastic items. Education is central to achieving change, raising awareness not only about the problem but also the solutions.

Programme

Lord Julian Hunt of Chesterton, President of ACOPS

Lord Hunt will welcome participants and explain the role of ACOPS.

Professor David Johnson, Chairman of ACOPS

Professor Johnson will explain the global context of marine litter and the growing interest of governments and society to tackle the issue. He will introduce the invited speakers and moderate questions and discussion.

Dr Peter Kershaw, Chairman of GESAMP

Dr Kershaw will set out why marine litter is a priority issue, establish what we currently know and underline what should be our main concerns.

Mr John Mouat, Deputy Secretary OSPAR Commission

Mr Mouat will outline the work of the OSPAR expert group dedicated to marine litter including: the development of common monitoring and assessment and the OSPAR Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter; including innovative collaborative solutions such as 'Fishing for Litter'.

Ms Maria Westerbos, Director Plastic Soup Foundation

Ms Westerbos will provide details of a series of inspirational practical actions tackling marine litter, involving industry and educating civil society.

Professor Richard Thompson, Plymouth University

Professor Thompson will outline current understanding about effects of plastic debris and microplastic debris in the marine environment. He will also summarise some of the potential solutions.

Take home messages

- Marine litter is a complex and multi-dimensional problem
- Much is already being done, but as the threat grows rather than diminishes it is clear that much more still remains to be done
- Turning the supply chain into a supply cycle by marrying end of life activities and recovery activities is one strong US-led message
- Marine litter is a collective and individual responsibility – take action

About our experts



Peter Kershaw is a marine environmental scientist based in the UK. Currently he is Chairman of GESAMP (The Joint Group of Experts on Scientific Aspects of Marine Protection – an Inter-Agency body of the United Nations). He leads GESAMP activities in the area of marine debris, chairs the GESAMP Working Group on microplastics and is a member of the Steering Committee of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML). He recently completed a series of papers for UNEP, in support of implementing the GPML, on topics including biodegradable plastics, microplastics and food safety, and best practices in marine litter reduction. He spent most of his career working for Cefas (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science), an Executive Agency of Defra.



John Mouat is a Deputy Secretary at the OSPAR Commission, the legal instrument that protects and conserves the North-East Atlantic and its resources, on behalf of the 15 Contracting Parties and European Union. He is responsible for the Committee on the Environmental Impacts of Human Activities (EIHA), which includes impacts from pressures such as marine litter. Together with the lead country Germany he has been responsible for coordinating the development of the OSPAR Regional Action Plan (RAP) on Marine Litter, which was adopted in 2014. The RAP outlines the actions what will be taken by Contracting Parties to fulfil their North East Atlantic Environment Strategy and MSFD commitments. John previously worked for the NGO KIMO International on a range of marine litter projects including; Fishing for Litter and a study on the Economic Impact of Marine Litter.



Maria Westerbos is an expert in mass communications, specialised in both traditional as well as new media. Her greatest talent is the ability to strategize and bring projects for social change to life, with an almost unerring instinct for what different target groups need. Her most recent success was founding the Plastic Soup Foundation in 2011 and transforming the attitudes of businesses, governments, consumers and NGOs regarding plastic microbeads in personal care products. Through its major BEAT THE MICROBEAD multimedia campaign, the foundation has since August 2012 ensured i) the phase out of microbeads in personal care products by national and international companies such as Unilever, Johnson & Johnson, Colgate Palmolive, HEMA, Kruidvat and ETOS, and ii) the creation of a broad (and growing) coalition, including 69 NGOs from 33 nations.



Richard Thompson is Professor of Marine Biology at Plymouth University, UK. He specialises in the ecology of shallow water habitats. Much of his work over the last decade has focused on marine debris, and in 2004 his team reported on the presence of microplastics in the environment in the journal *Science*. Subsequent research examined the extent to which microplastics were retained upon ingestion and potential for microplastics to transport pollutants to organisms. He was lead guest editor for a 200-page volume of the scientific journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, focusing on *Plastics the Environment and Human Health*. He is a co-author of the European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive text on marine litter and has recently prepared reports on this topic for the United Nations Global Environment Facility. In 2014 he presented his research to the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, at his Our Ocean meeting in Washington.

About the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea (ACOPS)

The mission of ACOPS is to promote strategies for sustainable global development relating to coastal and marine environment through scientific, legal and policy research and advisory and public awareness activities. Studying our seas and oceans both as indicators of pollution and as a threatened resource in their own right, ACOPS strives to identify cost-effective, long-term environmental solutions that can be effectively implemented across the world. For more information please visit www.acops.org.uk