

Plastic not so fantastic

June 2014

Year 3 to 7 children at Child Side School chose Marine as their big ideas this term. For several children this involved looking at the impact of plastic bags and other forms of rubbish that finds its way into the seas. Most of this rubbish reaches the seas via our urban stormwater systems and rivers, with 80% coming from landfill and other urban sources.

There are 5 major ocean gyres worldwide, which are areas of slow spiralling water and low winds. The India Ocean Gyre is just off the west coast of Australia, but the one which has collected the most amount of rubbish is the North Pacific Gyre. It is estimated to have 3.5 million tons of rubbish and this could double in the next 5 years.

The children already knew marine rubbish was a big issue for marine life. As many as 50% of the turtles in the sea ingest plastic bags and more than 1 million seabirds die each year from ingestion or entanglement in marine rubbish. However, they were very surprised to find out that it is now so bad that when we sit down to a seafood meal we are also likely to be consuming some of the toxic effects of plastic.

Plastic in the sea is broken down into smaller and smaller parts allowing life at the bottom of the marine food chain to ingest it. As these lower life forms are consumed by predators the higher order life forms accumulate more and more plastic. The issue is made worse as the plastic absorbs chemical and pollutants from the sea water, which then accumulate in the marine life.

This has led to many discussion between the children about what we can do to help reduce the problem. Linking into International Plastic Bag Free Day on Thursday 3rd July 2014 was one idea, but it was felt that more needed to be done. So the children have approached a major supermarket chain, which delivers the school's weekly groceries to explain what they have discovered and put forward ideas.

One option proposed was for people who shop online to be able to receive their groceries in recyclable 'green' bags rather than plastic bags. Another option was to provide customers with the choice of buying reusable net bags for putting their fruit and vegetables in. One child has even started to make these to sell at the schools enterprise afternoons.

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For more detail about International Plastic Bag Free Day: www.plasticbagfreeday.org