

Open Letter to Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews

## World Oceans Day highlights threat of marine plastic pollution

Today is World Oceans Day and our oceans are in crisis from plastic pollution. This is evident in the horrendous images of dissected seabirds with hundreds of pieces of plastic in their gut, whales and turtles suffering or dying from ingesting plastic bags, which are mistaken for jellyfish. Current research shows that microplastics are being ingested by plankton, their associated toxicants are being absorbed and passed up the food chain, all the way to our dinner plates.

Our oceans cannot continue to withstand our relentless plastic consumption and our evident inability to manage the resulting waste. Eight million tonnes of plastic enter global waterways each year. 95% of plastic packaging is used once and then thrown away.

Here in Victoria, we can be part of the global solution and address our own plastic litter problems. The 2016 Clean Up Australia Report (Victoria) stated that 38% of the over 3000 tonnes of litter that was collected was plastic. The Port Phillip EcoCentre (2014) executed a pilot study of microplastics in the Maribyrnong and Yarra Rivers and recorded the numbers of trawl sampled plastics in the Yarra (268) and the Maribyrnong (229), which equates to 586,920 and 501,510 per year, respectively. The trawl only covered a small portion of the width of those rivers, meaning that many more plastic items escaped capture and entered Port Phillip Bay. This semi-enclosed bay acts as a sink for any litter being carried in these rivers and creeks. A 12-month study by Beach Patrol (2017) estimated that hundreds of millions of pieces of plastic enter the Bay every year.

We have enough data – it's time for action. We must turn the tide on plastic pollution!

We, the undersigned, ask that the Victorian government take immediate and decisive action on the main avoidable sources of marine plastic pollution, as identified in the Federal Senate Environment & Communications Reference Committee Inquiry (April 2016, Attachment 1) "Toxic tide: the threat of marine plastic pollution in Australia":

1. Ban single-use plastic bags (including biodegradable, degradable and oxo-degradable bags)
2. Ban the sale of all products containing microbeads (cosmetic and industrial use)
3. Curtail excessive plastic packaging
4. Adopt a container deposit scheme
5. Better enforce existing laws to prevent nurdle spills from industrial sites

On behalf of all Victorians, we urge you to adopt a position that will act on each of these items in the lead up to the next meeting of state environment ministers.

Yours sincerely,



## **Attachment 1:**

### **Toxic tide: the threat of marine plastic pollution in Australia (Federal Senate Environment & Communications Reference Committee April 2016)**

#### Recommendation 13

8.65 The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the meeting of environment ministers working group, encourage all jurisdictions to support the implementation of targeted education campaigns which aim to change consumer behaviour in relation to the use of plastics, and to provide consumers with information regarding alternatives to traditional plastic.

#### Recommendation 15

8.78 The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the meeting of environment ministers working group, actively encourage the states and territories, which have not already done so, to consider the most effective methods to address marine plastic pollution in their jurisdictions. These should include implementation of container deposit schemes and other anti-littering mitigation strategies.

#### Recommendation 21

8.91 The committee recommends that the Australian Government support states and territories in banning the use of single-use lightweight plastic bags. In doing so, the Australia Government should ensure that alternatives do not result in other pollutants entering the environment.

#### Recommendation 22

8.95 The committee recommends that the Australian Government move to immediately ban the importation and production of personal care products containing microbeads.

#### Recommendation 23

8.97 The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the meeting of environment ministers working group, identify measures, including regulatory measures, already available to prevent plastics entering the marine environment and ensure that they are being implemented effectively in all jurisdictions. In particular, the committee recommends that more effective enforcement of environmental laws in relation to preventing nurdles entering the waste management system be pursued.