



Marine Litter

POSITION STATEMENT

What is Marine Litter?

Marine litter is any litter that ends up in the sea or any waterway. Amazingly, around 80% of marine litter originates from the land, making its way to our seas and oceans via our rivers and sewers. What makes this pollution is that marine litter introduces substances into the environment that have poisonous or harmful effects.ⁱ Plastic is just one form of marine litter, but is a huge problem; around the world about 8 million tonnes of plastic waste are discarded into the oceans every year. The vast majority of this sinks and then degrades into smaller pieces that are gradually returning to us in the food chain. In addition, more than 5 trillion pieces of plastic (1% of all oceanic plastic) are estimated to be afloat at sea.ⁱⁱ It is estimated that ocean plastic is set to treble in the next decade.ⁱⁱⁱ This is no surprise given that nearly a third of all plastics leak into the environment.^{iv}

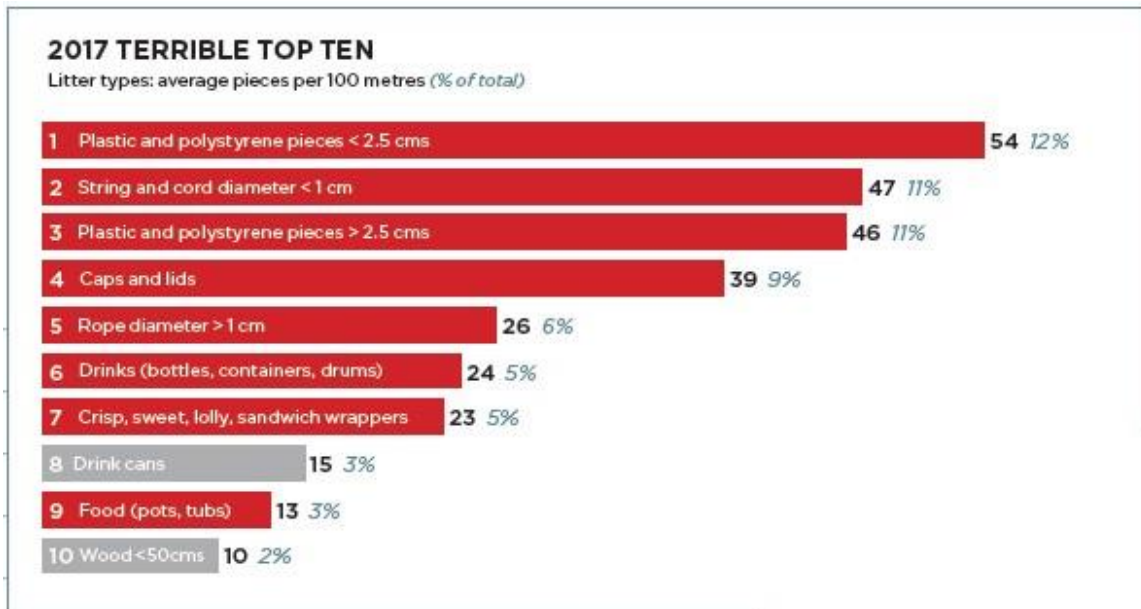
DEVELOPING OUR POSITION

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful welcomes the increase in awareness about the impact of marine litter and the wider debate that is taking place across the European Union and locally in Northern Ireland. We have engaged with policymakers, voluntary and community groups, businesses and other relevant organisations about this issue and its impact across Northern Ireland and its surrounding waters. We have also tracked the progress of this debate in the UK, Ireland and across the European Union through news stories and emerging research.

Locally, we have been surveying the impact of this problem through our Marine Litter report, which is produced every year with support from DAERA, and which tracks sources of marine litter in Northern Ireland.^v

We believe that government-led action can help promote awareness of the issue whilst also encouraging those who produce many of these items to find alternatives and to make sure they do not end up as litter. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful believes that with a collaborative approach between various stakeholders in society we can make substantial progress. We recognise that change will not happen overnight and that many plastic items are used daily by many people, however we believe that our goals in seeking change are both ambitious and achievable.

As we leave the European Union in March 2019, it is critical that we continue to attempt to solve this problem in a cooperative way. Marine litter does not recognise national boundaries, nor does it impact upon just one country. Litter spreads, kills wildlife and has detrimental impacts for all of us. Northern Ireland can place a greater emphasis on behaviour change and civic engagement in



OUR POSITION

At Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful we believe that;

- **Stopping littering is a priority-** Marine litter is a real problem in Northern Ireland. We cannot tackle litter effectively and protect our wildlife if we do not have a focus on marine litter. This is one of the more long lasting and harmful forms of litter for our wildlife and the general public. We believe that government at a local and national level should set a target to ensure the reduction of marine litter on our beaches and waterways. With 80% of this litter originating from the land, the issue must clearly be tackled at all sources on an ongoing basis.

We support deploying a variety of measures with the goal of changing behaviours as we work to build a society that takes its responsibilities, to create cleaner, greener and more sustainable communities, as seriously as it values its rights. We recognise that changing the culture requires a multi-faceted approach and a suitable scale of activity to achieve success.

- **Polluter Pays-** We support the use of fines and prosecutions for litterers and other enforcement measures. We also want to see the postcode lottery removed when it comes to issuing fines.
- **Positive Behaviour Change-** We encourage behaviour change interventions and campaigns such as:
 - Live Here Love Here, which promote civic pride and

- Eco-Schools, which promotes environmental education and sustainable lifestyles.
- All sectors must play their part to ensure comprehensive behavioural change throughout society.
- **Tackling the Supply Chain** - Government, manufacturers, retailers and Non-Governmental Organisations must work together to minimise the creation of potential litter, to reduce use of single use plastics, to develop new plastics that can be used in the circular economy (ie have a second use other than burning) and to achieve the reduction of littering across the country and ideally the minimisation of single use plastics in our society. All avenues to make this work must be explored including fiscal instruments, voluntary collaborations and legislative means.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Governmental institutions need to lead the way in formulating a coherent litter strategy and action plan with meaningful and ambitious targets on marine litter. A specific section is needed in any strategy on this issue.
- Targets to reduce the production and consumption of plastics, like the Plastic Bags Directive, should be introduced for all single use items. These measures must to be kept under review with amendments being made as required.
- Maintain the minimum EU standards announced for marine litter in May 2018 and mirror future changes in these measures.^{vi}
- Cooperation across governments, particularly at the UK and Ireland level, on these issues. Marine litter transcends borders and boundaries.
- Tougher fines on those caught discarding waste into our waterways and beaches.
- Mandatory awareness training courses to be established for all individuals and organisations found guilty of committing an environmental crime, similar to the system in place for driving offences.
- Work with the Fishing industry on better environmental practices whilst at sea.^{vii}

OUR ACTIONS

- Quarterly Marine Litter Surveys carried out on ten beaches across Northern Ireland. The resulting annual report is posted to every Councillor in Northern Ireland and published online. The data is also sent to the OSPAR Commission.
- The Eco-Schools programme will continue demonstrating the importance of environmental education across Northern Ireland. We plan to develop a new marine topic and manage the Litter Less (Wrigley) Campaign.
- Funding has also been requested for a 'WhatSUP?' initiative, designed to specifically reduce the volume of single use plastic being produced, used and littered in Northern Ireland. This initiative seeks to raise awareness of the cost and damage of plastics for the environment. It would challenge schools, businesses, local authorities and the general public to avoid single use plastics, demand alternatives and dispose of/recycle any plastics in a responsible way.
- Continue operation of and enhance the Live Here Love Here campaign to encourage behaviour change amongst the general public in regard to littering through innovative and novel communications and support for community projects.

CONCLUSION

Marine litter is an important part of the litter problem in Northern Ireland. Whilst this problem is growing and causing severe damage locally and globally, it can be tackled. With collaborative action between key industries and government we can achieve substantive progress. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful believes that the impact of marine litter causes huge damage to our wildlife and the general public. We need a mix of tougher action on polluters, work to develop products without plastics and a strong emphasis on changing behaviour, particularly with regard to single use plastics.

ⁱ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/good-environmental-status/descriptor-10/index_en.htm ⁱⁱ DOI: 10.1126/science.aaa7848 ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/plastic-pollution-sea->

[increasegovernment-scientists-uk-oceans-a8266356.html](https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications/the-new-plastics-economyrethinking-the-future-of-plastics)

^{iv} <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications/the-new-plastics-economyrethinking-the-future-of-plastics> ^v

<https://keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.etinu.net/keepnorthernirelandbeautiful/documents/007295.pdf> ^{vi} europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3927_en.pdf ^{vii} See Fishing Industry addendum at the end of this document.