



Plastic Bag Ban  
Department of Water and Environmental Regulation  
168 St Georges Terrace  
PERTH WA 6000  
Email: plasticbagban@dwer.wa.gov.au

8<sup>th</sup> February 2018

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Sea Shepherd Australia Supports Plastic Bag Ban in Western Australia**

We provide this submission in response to the Western Australian (WA) Government's ban on lightweight single-use plastic bags from 1 July 2018.

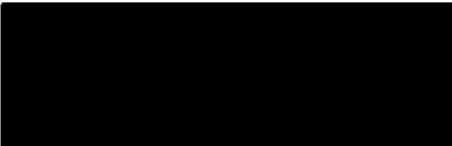
Sea Shepherd globally and here in Australia is increasingly concerned about the impact of marine plastic pollution. Ubiquitous in the marine environment, plastic is having a devastating impact on the marine ecosystems of rivers, coastlines and oceans worldwide and poses a significant danger to innocent wildlife through entanglement, suffocation and also chemical contamination through ingestion. Microplastics are now a part of the food chain.

To combat the growing tide of marine debris in the world's oceans and waterways, in February 2016 Sea Shepherd Australia established a Marine Debris Campaign. The campaign brings together the efforts of dedicated marine debris teams and their volunteers from around Australia to keep beaches and waterways cleaner and safer for marine life, while collecting data for national analysis and educational outreach. The campaign was initially founded by three women from Sea Shepherd's Perth chapter who simply wanted to provide an avenue for volunteers to be part of a solution to the increasing issue of marine pollution, particularly plastic.

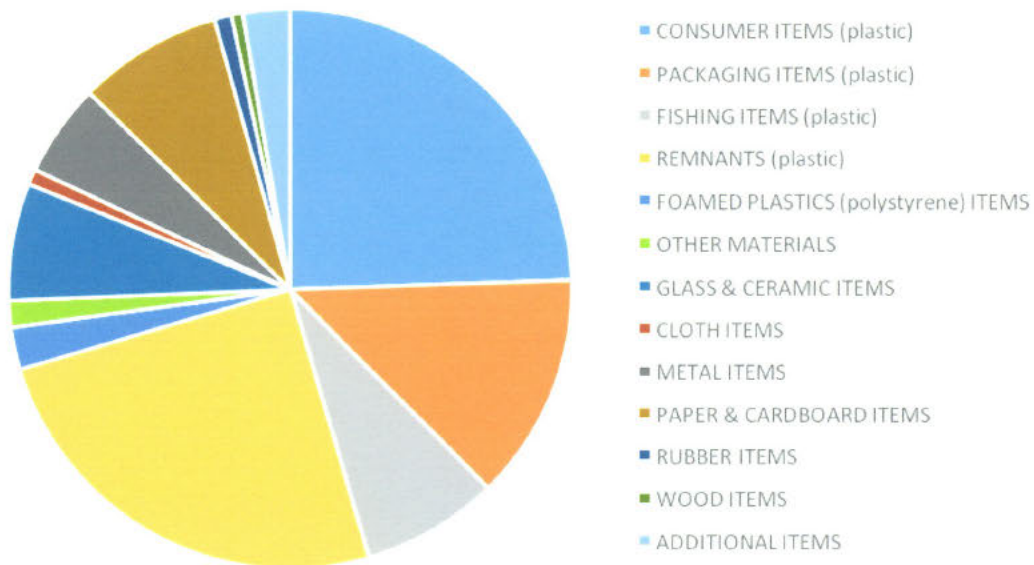
From the first beach clean-up organised at Coogee Beach with just a handful of volunteers, the campaign has exceeded all expectations from the results achieved to the incredible community support and engagement on this issue. In just two years, over 10,000 volunteers have removed in excess of 1.2 million pieces of marine debris from hundreds of coastal locations around the Australian continent (including many locations in Western Australia) and offshore at the Cocos Keeling Islands.

At all Sea Shepherd Australia Marine Debris Campaign clean-ups items collected are sorted, catalogued, counted and recorded then uploaded to the Australian Marine Debris Initiative (AMDI) database coordinated by Tangaroa Blue. In 2017, over 6,000 volunteers removed 712,589 items of marine debris, the vast majority of items picked up were sadly of plastic origin.

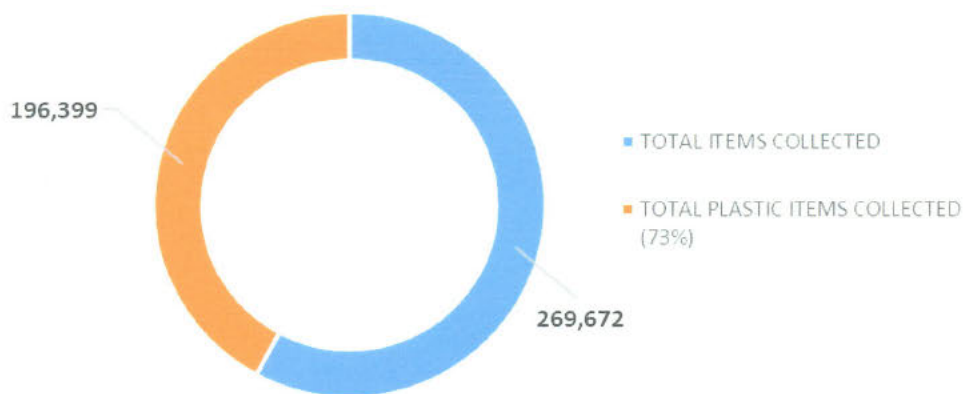
In Western Australia at the 42 river and beach clean-ups we hosted last year alone, 2,041 volunteers collected 269,672 pieces of marine debris, with plastic items making up a whopping 73%. Of this total 6,186 items were single-use plastic bags, dog poo and ice bags and we recorded 1,060 bait bags and packaging. Numbers of pieces of ripped, torn and broken up plastic bags ran into the tens of thousands - we have found at every clean-up plastic, soft or hard, large or small, doesn't break down but rather breaks up into smaller and smaller pieces. Single-use plastic items (such as plastic bags, coffee cups, plastic water bottles and food packaging and plastic straws), cigarette butts and polystyrene foam food packaging forms the majority of what is collected which indicates the problem is indeed widespread and not unique to a specific location.



### Sea Shepherd Australia Marine Debris Campaign WA Clean-up Results 2017



### Sea Shepherd Australia Marine Debris Campaign Plastic Composition at WA Clean-ups 2017



This level of marine plastic pollution entering our oceans and waterways simply cannot continue. Unless the world takes action scientists have reported than by 2050 there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish.

The Department's Discussion Paper *Implementing a lightweight single-use plastic bag ban in Western Australia* states that there is strong community support for banning the bag and we could not agree more. For more than three years our Sea Shepherd Marine Debris crew members have noted the steady increase in the number of willing volunteers across a range of ages, who donate their time each month to tirelessly clean up the mess caused by marine litter, particularly items from the unfettered production, distribution and wasteful discard of single-use plastic packaging. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) War on Waste series in 2017 achieved top TV ratings and was the ABC's most successful social media campaign to date further demonstrating the public interest in this area. There has never been a more appropriate time for the WA Government to take the nation's lead by creating an



effective policy response and setting new benchmarks by not just stopping at banning light weight single-use plastic bags at “retailers”.

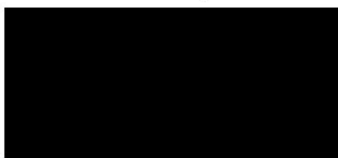
Our other recommendations include:

- Sea Shepherd Australia urges the WA Government to ban HPDE plastic bags up to 70 microns. Experience in other Australian jurisdictions shows that by banning bags up to 35 microns results in consumers simply purchasing thicker plastic bags.
- The definition of a retailer in your Discussion Paper gives the impression that only a retail shop or food outlet selling goods will be required to discontinue use of light weight plastic bags from 1 July 2018. The definition of Retailer should not be limited to retail shops and should include importers, wholesalers and businesses that trade goods online.
- Sea Shepherd Australia agrees with the Government that biodegradable, degradable and compostable bags be included in the ban coming into effect on 1 July 2018. Biodegradable and Degradable plastics do not break down in the marine environment and in fact behave quite differently to that of a terrestrial setting (i.e. landfill or composter).
- Sea Shepherd Australia supports a consistent statewide ban on other single-use plastics such as drinking straws, microbeads in personal and household products and mass balloons releases.
- The appointment of an independent taskforce to conduct a review of the implemented policy with the view to restrict other forms of single-use plastics that are not presently under consideration under this policy.

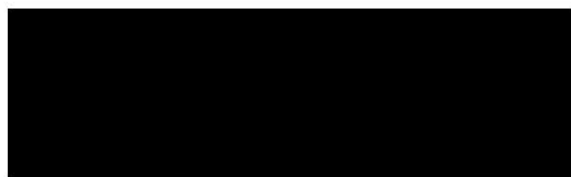
Given that there are currently 18,000 pieces of plastic litter floating on every square kilometre of the world’s oceans and that an estimated 44% of marine mammals, 86% of sea turtles and up to 90% of seabirds have plastic in their guts, every piece of plastic we stop from entering the ocean is a potential life saved.

Given that micro plastics absorb many of the toxic chemicals we have directly or indirectly put into the ocean, and that plastics are now right through the ocean food chain, plastics pollution is a growing threat to human health also, as warned by the United Nations.

Yours sincerely



Jeff Hansen  
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Sea Shepherd Australia



Liza Dicks  
Marine Debris Campaign - National Coordinator  
Sea Shepherd Australia



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