

# We live in a world of plastic

By Emma Bartram and Maddy Swa

Like fish in an aquarium, we swim in a world of plastic hopes - John S. Dickerson. This is a clear explanation of how we are all getting our hopes up, thinking that plastic will just disappear from our ocean - but that's not the case.

We conducted our own survey to find roughly 25% of people believe that 16 billion pounds of plastic enter the ocean each year. While 27.5% think way more, and that could be correct. As far as scientists have discovered, 16 billion pounds is correct, so it is heartening that at least 50% of people are aware that plastic is a problem. To make this even more of a problem, 50% of people know about this and don't do anything about it. We humans use around 1 million plastic bags a minute and we don't think about where they go. Even if you throw them in the bin, they always find a drain, then a pipe, which leads to a

lake, then a river, then an ocean. And this is where all our plastic ends up. Think about how long we use a plastic bag for; on average it's about 12 minutes. Some people may reuse their plastic bags, but other than that, you're using them, reusing them once, and then throwing them out. The bad thing about soft plastic, is you can't recycle it, but you can reduce how much you use it.

We interviewed Young Ocean Explorer, Riley Hathaway, about her thoughts on this matter. Riley is an amazing, inspiring NZ girl and by the age of 17 she has all ready done a TEDx talk and spoke at National Young Leaders' Day. The team at YOE (Young Ocean Explorers), produces T.V episodes on our beautiful, blue, backyard to drive people to love our ocean as much as Riley and her family do.

## **What was your first thought when you realised how much rubbish roams the ocean?**

*I can't really explain it, but it was heartbreaking. And it still makes me feel the same way everytime I see a video or see it first hand... it's so horrible.*

## **What is your main focus for Young Ocean Explorers?**

*Our main focus for YOE is to inspire everyone to love our oceans. Because once you fall in love with something you want to look after it! We want to show people just how beautiful our backyard is, the ocean and all that lives in it.*

## **Where have you seen the most plastic and how does it affect you?**

*Up at the Kermadec Islands. These islands are half way to Tonga (1000km away) but still part of NZ. My dad and I got the opportunity to go up there about 3 years ago and it was the trip of a lifetime. These islands are said to be one of the most pristine marine environments in the world, and the snorkelling there was insane! But when we went on the main island (Raoul, we had to get permission from DOC) the very first thing we noticed was plastic and it was everywhere. This one beach we landed on was covered in plastic, it left me speechless. We gave ourselves one minute to pick up as much plastic as we could and in one minute we overfilled a massive fish bin that we'd found on the rocky foreshore, but what was even more heartbreaking was the fact*

*that we could've spend hours on end trying to pick up all the rubbish on this beach but we wouldn't have scratched the surface of just how much rubbish was embedded under every rock. It was completely devastating as the Kermadec Islands are so far away from any civilisation and it was covered in our rubbish, just imagine how much is actually in the ocean.*

**Do you have any ideas to stop this crisis?**

*There are a couple things we can easily do, one being to try and stop using single-use plastic and the other being just picking up plastic as it may seem like it won't make much of a difference but every piece picked up is a piece that doesn't make it into the ocean. We've just started this campaign "1+A day," to try to get everyone to work together to pick up at least one piece of plastic a day, as that will have an impact on our ocean, and it's so easy to do!*

Death by plastic is occurring more frequently - more than 100 million marine animals are killed by plastic every year. (1) The documentary, A Plastic Ocean, showed viewers how rubbish harms

ocean creatures. In one example, over 100 pieces of rubbish were found in *one* sea bird. This is heartbreaking. To think that these creatures have died just because we haven't been looking after our country and our ocean well enough. New Zealand is one of the worst places to have plastic as we have more seabird species than anywhere else in the world. Researchers have estimated that for every 2.2 pounds of plankton in an area around New Zealand, there is 13.2 pounds of plastic. (2) Just around our country! We need to help our country and our globe, even if it's picking up 1 piece of rubbish a day - like Riley said. This could help a lot more sea birds survive.

And this isn't just anywhere! Our ocean is connected to beaches all around the world including Hawkes Bay's very own Ocean Beach and Waimarama. There are around 250,000 people in Hawkes Bay, so imagine if every local picked up 1 piece of plastic a day, every week. Think about how much rubbish wouldn't be entering the sea. So it doesn't matter where you are, but what you do about it.

You can't be somewhere without plastic within 5 metres of you anymore. We live in a world of plastic. If we don't do something, by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in our oceans. Our marine animals deserve to live in a blue ocean, not a plastic soup.



This is what our beach looks like now...

Photo credit: Maddy Swa



And this is what it could look like soon!

(1) = Source: Website "IFL Science - Death By Plastic"

(2) = Source: Website "See Turtles - Ocean Plastic"