

## Plastic vortex wreaks havoc on marine life

By Campbell Cooney for Australia Network

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**The plastic vortex of the Northern Pacific is where much of the non-biodegradable rubbish from everyday life ends up.**

The giant floating rubbish patch is a large accumulation of debris swirling within one of the largest and most remote ecosystems on the planet in the North Pacific Gyre.

Researchers estimate the vortex is twice the size of the US state of Texas and four times the size of Japan. The patch includes plastics, chemical sludge and other debris that has been trapped by the currents.

For many years, its existence was unknown and when it was first discovered in 2000, marine researchers were shocked.

Ten years on, scientist still know little about the man-made problem.

But over the past two years a group of marine scientists and activists have been measuring the scale of the vortex and looking for ways to control it.

They call themselves Project Kaisei, and one of the coordinators, Doug Woodring, is in Australia to raise awareness about the problem.

Mr Woodring says the dump is made of mainly non-biodegradable plastics and synthetics including fishing nets.

"We did find what they call 'ghost nets' which are derelict fishing nets and those cause damage not only to the shipping industry... but they continue to kill marine life as they float around," he said.

He says what worries the group most is the impact the plastic dump is having on marine life.

"When a [sperm] whale in California washed up six months ago, they opened its stomach and it had 400 kilos of plastic and netting inside," he said.

Mr Woodring says the extent of damage caused by the vortex is still unknown.

"There's some evidence that the plastic is raining down [on the ocean floor]... and we have no way to know what might be on the bottom," he said.

"Of all the debris that goes to into the ocean, roughly 70 per cent sinks... and the impact is potentially great on marine life."

Mr Woodring says the plastic vortex is an international problem that is the responsibility of all nations.

But he says he is impressed with some of the current conservation measures being conducted in Australia.



*Plastic and other debris found in the plastic vortex in the North Pacific (ABC)*

- [Video: The Plastic Vortex is where life's non-biodegradable rubbish ends up. Scientists get a closer look \(ABC AP APNC\)](#)

"It's so ocean-centric here. So many people live around the coast and appreciate the ocean," he said.

"You've done great work."

Project Kaisei is now working to raise awareness about the problem and is working with companies to reduce the impact of plastics.

"Companies now are starting to listen, so we're having some good dialogue with big leading multinationals... and that's who we need at the table," Mr Woodring said.

"We need to be working with everyone so we all can collaborate, there's no one silver bullet," he said.

The scientists intend to return to the vortex for another study later this year.

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