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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

9 September, 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find this submission to a Senate Standing Committee's Inquiry on the Threat of Marine Plastic Pollution in Australia from the Tasmanian Branch of the Waste Management Association Australia (WWAA).

WWAA is the peak body for all stakeholders in the waste and resource recovery industry. Our purpose is to support our members in achieving sustainable waste and resource management across Australia. We are the voice of the industry, the first port of call for government when seeking industry views and input. On this basis we provide comment on the Threat of Marine Plastic Pollution in Australia.

Plastic is light weight, easily windblown and it floats in water, often travelling long distances via the stormwater system to impact on our beaches. The Ocean Conservancy estimates that 59% of all marine litter is from land-based shoreline and recreational activities.

As an island state Tasmania the problem of marine plastic pollution is significantly pronounced. The annual South-West Marine Debris Clean-Up collected 48,000 separate items of litter mostly plastic from five beaches in Tasmania's 'pristine wilderness areas' in 2014. This is coupled by Keep Australia Beautiful National Litter Index Figures that showed Tasmania had the highest amount of litter by item over successive recent years. These reports show that marine plastic pollution is a serious environmental problem even for a small state like Tasmania and that further resources need to be directed to the issue.

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At the global level there are the five enormous plastic garbage patches in the oceans – one in the North Pacific that is estimated to be larger than the Australian continent, one in the south pacific, two in the Atlantic and one in the Indian Ocean. These garbage patches accumulate in the ocean gyres, trapping the plastic. Alarmingly, studies have revealed between 40-80% of all marine mammals, birds and fish have plastic in their guts. It looks like food to them and fills their stomachs up. Based on conservative estimates, plastic pollution is costing developing nations \$1.27 billion annually and the global economy over \$7 trillion annually.

The Tasmanian Branch of the WMAA supports initiatives to reduce marine plastic pollution programs aimed at eliminating or reducing existing stock piles of non-degradable plastics. Such programs include new plastic waste recycling and recovery technologies from Europe, new standards on biodegradable and degradable plastics, sustainable solutions that include economic drivers that hinder excessive waste generation and aid increased reduction and recycling (E.g. a Statewide Waste Levy and Container Deposit Legislation).

We also understand that the most effective method to achieve strong outcomes is a legislative approach.

In conclusion, we consider improved recycling is one of the most important short term actions currently available to reduce these impacts. Recycling together with the elimination of non biodegradable waste also provides opportunities to reduce oil usage, carbon dioxide emissions and the quantities of waste requiring disposal.

The Tasmanian Branch of WMAA supports the Senate Standing Committee's Inquiry on the Threat of Marine Plastic Pollution in Australia investigation into initiatives to reduce marine plastic pollution.

Regards



James Wood

President

Tasmanian Branch of the WMAA

