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29B/17 Macmahon Street
Hurstville NSW 2220

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18 November 2022

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
PO Box 6021
Canberra ACT 2600

Correspondence via email: CCEEW@aph.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into Plastic Pollution in Australia's Oceans and Waterways.

Dear Committee Secretariat,

The Australian Wildlife Society is writing to comment on the Inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

The Australian Wildlife Society wishes to focus on one key issue, plastic ring-shaped items, as part of our SnipRingsforWildlife campaign in response to the Inquiry. However, we also want to briefly draw attention to the negative impact of helium balloons on our wildlife and the environment emphasising that urgent action is needed now to protect our native species from the effects of helium balloons.

Australia produces some 2.5 million tonnes of plastic waste annually, and around 130,000 tonnes leak into the environment, including our oceans and waterways. The impact of plastic pollution on marine environments is significant, particularly as larger plastic items break down and leave microplastic remnants that plants, wildlife, and humans absorb.

In 2020, the Society founded a new campaign called SnipRingsforWildlife (PDF Presentation). The campaign aims to raise awareness and encourage individuals to protect Australia's wildlife by cutting through **plastic rings**, rubber bands, hair ties, loops of facemasks, and **plastic dome-shaped lids** before disposing of them.



Each year, thousands of birds and semi-aquatic wildlife such as platypus, turtles, and water dragons are strangled, obtain significant injuries, and often die horrific deaths from plastic ring-shaped items. Wildlife becomes entangled in ring-shaped items that wrap around their beak or muzzle, preventing them from eating. These items can also tangle up their feet, wings, or fins, limiting their movement. Young animals can become entrapped in these items, and as they grow, these items cut into their flesh, sometimes amputating limbs, or killing the animal. Other animals mistake these items for food and ingest them.



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Below are a couple of examples of the victims of these rings:



This magpie was lucky to be found before starving to death. Many birds do not fare so well. They succumb silently, in agony, and out of sight. Image: WIRES Northern Rivers.



This water dragon got his head stuck in a plastic ring of a discarded bottle and would have slowly starved to death if it had not been rescued. Image: WIRES Northern Rivers.



This platypus was spotted with a plastic ring around its neck and would have succumbed to significant injuries if not rescued. Image: Dr Ian Gibbs.



This turtle has been deformed. It could not break this plastic belt around its waist as it grew, and its shell is now permanently deformed. Image: Marcus Eriksen.



This corella was found with a dome-shaped plastic lid around its neck. Unfortunately, there was not a happy ending for this little corella. Image: Julie, QLD.



This short-beaked common dolphin starves to death after being unable to open its mouth from discarded twine-like plastic caught around the dolphin's beak. Image: Sandra Hilton.



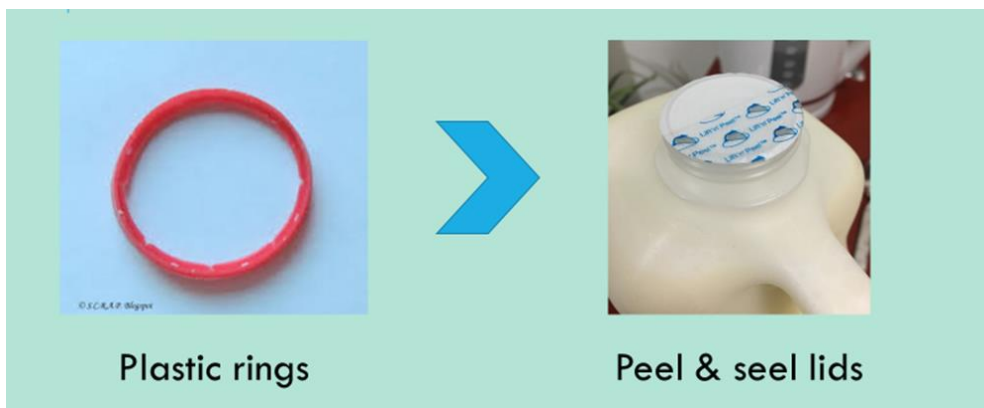
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We acknowledge and commend the companies that have taken action to make a positive change and improve their products for Australia's wildlife. However, most companies are not acting. The issue still occurs despite contacting numerous manufacturers, informing them of the danger that plastic ring-shaped items pose to native wildlife, and encouraging them to improve their products. Jars, bottles, and tetra packs with plastic lids now come with a plastic ring that snaps apart from the lid upon opening or a peel-off seal under the cap. However, unfortunately, the alternatives are still made of plastic.



On Wednesday, 19 May 2021, the Society met with Mark Coure, MP. The Society asked for Mark's support to help protect wildlife from the risk of entanglement and death from ring-shaped items. Mark expressed a great interest in our wildlife conservation projects across New South Wales and agreed to support our campaign. Petition 2882, '#SnipRingsforWildlife – a campaign to help protect wildlife from the risk of entanglement and death', was lodged in the NSW Legislative Assembly by Mr Mark Coure MP on behalf of over five hundred citizens in November 2021.

We received a response to our #SnipRingsforWildlife petition, which acknowledged the importance of the campaign. The response focused on plastic waste reduction and stated that the Plastic Reduction and Circular Economy Bill 2021 might provide a framework to address ring-shaped items in the future. The response highlighted that the New South Wales Plastics Action Plan outlines a commitment to review other plastic items for a future phase-out, including plastic cups and their lids (including dome-shaped plastic lids), in three years to determine whether a phase-out is appropriate at that time. The response stated that the government recently released the New South Wales Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041. The strategy outlines the government's approach to transitioning to a circular economy over the next twenty years and introduces a new overall litter reduction of sixty percent by 2030 and a plastic litter reduction target of thirty percent by 2025. Over five years, the strategy will invest \$38 million in litter prevention programs to help protect the natural environment, waterways, and wildlife.

Unfortunately, no specific or prompt action was taken to address the negative impact of plastic ring-shaped items on our wildlife and the environment at a community level, industry level, or state level. A copy of the response can be found [HERE](#).



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The Society is committed to raising awareness and advocating to protect native wildlife from the threat of plastic ring-shaped items as part of its SnipRingsforWildlife campaign.

In response to the Inquiry:

1. The Society would like to see the Plastic Reduction and Circular Economy Bill 2021 prohibit the supply of plastic ring-shaped items, phase out this targeted item over the next ten years, and, in the meantime, implement wildlife-friendly alternatives.
2. The NSW Plastics Action Plan outlines a commitment to review plastic items such as dome-shaped plastic lids for a future phase-out. However, the time is now! The Society would like to see action on dome-shaped plastic lids.
3. The Society would like to see the effectiveness of the Australian government's engagement with states, territories, industry, and non-government organisations to reduce plastic pollution in oceans and waterways, particularly plastic ring-shaped items.
4. The Society would like to see additional funding allocated directly towards the SnipRingsforWildlife campaign so that it has the resources to educate the public while the phase-out is in process.

Australian Wildlife Society, founded in 1909, is a national not-for-profit wildlife conservation organisation. We are dedicated to conserving Australian wildlife (flora and fauna) through national environmental education, public awareness, advocacy, hands-on wildlife conservation work, and community involvement. The Society encourages your strong support for this action and an acknowledgement of the receipt of this letter, please.

Yours sincerely



Patrick W Medway AM
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

