



HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

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

By email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

14 September 2020

Dear Secretary,

Re: Senate Inquiry – Recycling and Waste Bills 2020 - Invitation to make a submission

Humane Society International (HSI) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Senate Inquiry into the *Recycling and Waste Bills 2020* on behalf of our 70,000 Australian supporters.

HSI has been at the forefront of marine wildlife conservation since 1994. HSI was one of the key NGOs behind the passage of the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and has nominated and secured listing under that piece of legislation for over 100 habitats and species including marine mammals, sharks and seabirds. It was also an HSI nomination that secured the listing for Marine Debris to be listed as a Key Threatening Process under the EPBC Act which has led to the Threat Abatement Plan. HSI has led coalitions to secure global protections for the great white and whale sharks under CITES¹ and CMS², and continues to nominate imperilled species for further listings under international instruments.

HSI continues our effort in marine conservation with this submission for the *Waste and Recycling Bills 2020*. While this Bill is a good first-step to addressing the issue of waste in Australia, HSI urges that improvements can be made. Plastic pollution is a fast spreading epidemic that is killing marine wildlife through entanglement or ingestion of plastic debris, causing suffocation, starvation, and drowning. Every year, over eight million tons of plastic waste enters the oceans (Jambeck *et al.* 2015) and research shows that 90% of all seabirds and 65% of fish species have ingested plastic over the course of their lifetimes (Wilcox *et al.* 2015, Markic *et al.* 2019). We stress the importance of passing legislation banning or otherwise restricting the use of single-use plastics and packaging for the health of our ecosystems.

Plastic pollution is increasing, it is pervasive, and it is global. As a former field biologist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, I was fortunate enough to live and work in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Remote and pristine, these coral cays have remained untouched by fishing and chemical pollution—but even here, plastic pollution rears its destructive head. Sea turtles entangled in discarded fishing gear and colonies of seabirds are blighted by this plague. Albatross parents feed their chicks bottlecaps, lighters, toothbrushes and balloons. Soon the young birds' stomachs are so full that they can no longer feed, and so they die. Plastic pollution causes painful and undistinguished deaths to our ocean's most magnificent species.

US Office:
Washington DC

Regional Offices:
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Canada
Europe
India
Latin America
Mexico
United Kingdom

¹ The Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species

² Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

This is a global problem, and including amendments and passage of this bill would help put Australia at the forefront of a solution. As one of Australia's leading organisations working on the conservation of threatened marine wildlife, we call for the opportunity to amend and improve the *Recycling and Waste Bills 2020*, and urge the Senate to seriously consider the importance and necessity of this bill.

A more comprehensive and effective plan for reducing plastics pollution in Australia was presented with the *Product Stewardship Amendment (Packaging and Plastics) Bill 2019*, and we support amendments to the *Recycling and Waste Bills 2020* to increase its scope and impact.

The *Packaging and Plastics Bill 2019* (the Bill) comprehensively addressed and would have implemented feasible solutions to these issues associated with plastic pollution. Amendments to the *Recycling and Waste Bills 2020* will result in:

- A reduction in the amount of packaging and plastics being consumed;
- An increase in the rate and quality of recycling and composting of packaging and plastics;
- An increase in the use of recycled content in packaging; and
- A reduction in the amount of plastic being littered and entering the marine environment

It is essential the problem is tackled at its source—forcing companies, industries, restaurants and supermarkets to acknowledge their over-indulgence in single use plastics and make better decisions for consumers and the environment. These decisions can be as simple as using biodegradable alternatives to straws, cups and bags, or rewarding the use of reusable cups and containers for food and beverage service.

These steps will also address the recurrent issue of recycling efficiency in Australia. For many years, plastic waste from Australia had been sent to China for processing, but that arrangement is to be terminated. Now, most plastic recyclable waste ends up stockpiling in landfills or polluting natural areas as only 12% is recycled (2016-17 Australian Plastics Recycling Survey).

As global marine wildlife struggles to adapt to changing ocean temperatures and chemistry, as well as destructive and over-exploitative fishing practices, we must do everything we can to mitigate further threats such as plastic pollution. The well-being of our iconic Australian marine wildlife depends on it.

We need decisive action by the federal parliament to tackle both the marine plastic and recycling crisis pollution. The goodwill of millions of Australians who are already doing their bit is being seriously challenged by systemic failures and our government must show leadership and address these issues by passing this Bill.

Yours Sincerely,

Lawrence Chlebeck
Marine Campaigner
Humane Society International

2. Markic, A., Gaertner, J.C., Gaertner-Mazouni, N., Koelmans, A.A., 2019. Plastic ingestion by marine fish in the wild. *Critical Reviews in Environmental Science and Technology*
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10643389.2019.1631990>
3. Wilcox, C., Van Sabille, E., Hardesty, B.D., 2015. Threat of plastic pollution to seabirds is global, pervasive and increasing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 112 (38) 11899-11904