WHAT GOES INTO THE OCEAN,GOES INTO YOU

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Start

The dumping of plastic waste into the ocean is on the rise. Surveys carried out in South African beaches five years apart, show that the densities of all plastic debris have increased substantially and that plastic constitutes over 80% of all debris collected (Derraik, 2002). From 12 – 18 October, this *National Marine Week* , the EWT's Source to Sea Programme will conduct educational talks at local schools on the journey of waste from our rivers to the ocean, to raise consciousness on how everyone can do their bit to save our oceans.

Some of the threats faced by our oceans include overexploitation and harvesting, dumping of industrial and domestic waste, invasions of alien species, coastal development and climate change. One particular form of human impact constitutes a major threat to marine life: land-based marine pollution.

Bridget Corrigan, the EWT's Source to Sea Programme Manager, comments: "Marine pollution is a huge concern from a biodiversity and ecological standpoint as well as from a human health aspect. Oceans are not dumping grounds and we cannot consider dilution to be a solution. Eventually, our waste will catch up with us and make it impossible to ignore. Everyone has a role to play in reducing the scourge of marine waste."

Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), such as micro-plastics and heavy metals from industrial waste streams, often become concentrated in apex predators, such as tuna. Given that humans consume vast quantities of seafood, this should seriously concern us as we are the ultimate apex predator and these pollutants accumulate in our fat and muscle tissue.

Chemicals incorporated in, or attracted to plastics floating in seawater have a broad range of potentially toxic, carcinogenic and hormone disturbing effects. Plastic is now found on virtually all South African beaches, even the most remote, and researchers are now also finding plastic rubbish in Antarctic regions. Sea turtles and sea birds are some of the most seriously affected species, as a consequence of not only habitat loss and bycatch, but also through entanglement in, and ingestion of marine litter (SAEON, 2011).

The EWT's Source to Sea Programme works across southern Africa on a range of freshwater and marine projects, including mainstreaming the Ecosystems Approach at the Orange River Mouth estuary, blue economy development along the Wild Coast and protection of Dugongs in the Bazaruto Archipelago Marine National park, Mozambique. **"**Only by thinking globally and acting locally, can we hope to turn the situation around. A combination of improved legislation and a greater awareness of ecological

processes is likely to be the best way to solve such environmental problems. Collectively with the general public and the scientific community, we need to ensure that governments and businesses get actively involved in preserving our marine resources. It is, without a doubt, an imperative that we address issues threatening our oceans' biodiversity, such as the pollution by plastic debris" remarks Corrigan.

National Marine Week is an annual awareness campaign driven by the national Department of Environmental Affairs: Ocean and Coasts Directorate. The aim is to create awareness on the marine and coastal environment and to promote sustainable use and conservation of these resources, for the benefit of both present and future generations. For more information on the EWT's Source to Sea Programme and National Marine Week events hosted by the EWT, please contact Bridget Corrigan on bridgetc@ewt.org.za.

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