



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Senate Environment and Communications References
report:

Toxic tide: the threat of marine plastic pollution in
Australia

May 2024

Response

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that any future Australian Government policies on mitigating the threat from marine plastic be underpinned by sound, peer-reviewed research.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Australian Government actively support research into the effects of marine plastic pollution in Australian waters, including research to more fully evaluate:

- the extent of marine plastic pollution;
- the sources of marine plastic pollution;
- the effects at the population level; and
- the effects on ecosystems particularly in the Great Barrier Reef.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Australian Government actively support research into the threat posed by microplastic pollution, including research to:

- identify the extent of microplastic pollution;
- evaluate the effects of microplastic pollution on marine fauna;
- evaluate the effects of microplastic pollution on ecosystems; and
- identify mitigation measures.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the Australian Government actively support research into the threat posed by marine plastic pollution, particularly microplastic, on human health.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake work to identify and establish the costs of the externalities associated with marine plastic pollution.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 6

- a. The committee recommends that industry contributes further funding of scientific research through the Australian Packaging Covenant.
- b. The committee recommends that this funding be provided for research which particularly addresses the effect of marine plastic pollution on marine fauna, and human health from ingestion as well as research to identify mitigation strategies.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the Australian Government consult with stakeholders, including the Tangaroa Blue Foundation, CSIRO and relevant scientists, to explore mechanisms to establish a national marine pollution database.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 8

a. The committee recommends that the Australian Government place marine plastic pollution on the Council of Australian Governments' agenda for urgent consideration.

b. In recognition of the level of threat associated with plastic pollution in Australia's marine environment, and the need for a comprehensive and coordinated response, the committee recommends that the Australian Government pursue the establishment of a working group, under the auspices of the meeting of environment ministers, to address specific matters related to marine plastic pollution.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that the Australian Government explore opportunities for increased regional leadership and direct support on the issue of marine plastic pollution, including projects focused on ghost net recovery.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the Australian Government pursue mechanisms to improve support and coordination of clean-up activities through the meeting of environment ministers working group to ensure that the most effective outcomes of these activities are achieved.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- support CSIRO research to identify the extent of ghost nets in Australian waters, and to identify means to prevent the loss of fishing gear;
- support the development of innovative technologies for the tagging of fishing gear and support the introduction of these technologies by the Australian-based fishing industry, and by fishing industries in regional countries;
- undertake a review of current Commonwealth arrangements to detect and remove ghost nets; and
- develop a nationally consistent strategy through the meeting of environment ministers working group to ensure that ghost nets are collected in a timely manner in the Australian Fishing Zone, and coastal waters.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that the Australian Government reinstate funding for GhostNets Australia to allow it to continue its work to identify and retrieve ghost nets.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the meeting of environment ministers working group, encourage all jurisdictions to support the implementation of targeted education campaigns which aim to change consumer behaviour in relation to the use of plastics, and to provide consumers with information regarding alternatives to traditional plastic.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends that the Australian Government implement the recommendations from the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee inquiry into stormwater management in Australia, in particular:

- Recommendation 1—the development and implementation of a national policy framework for stormwater management (a National Stormwater Initiative); and
- Recommendation 4—the consideration of new funding models and financial incentives that would facilitate improved stormwater management outcomes in an economically efficient way.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the meeting of environment ministers working group, actively encourage the states and territories, which have not already done so, to consider the most effective methods to address marine plastic pollution in their jurisdictions. These should include implementation of container deposit schemes and other anti-littering mitigation strategies.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends that, if all states and territories have not introduced container deposit scheme legislation by 2020, the Australian Government revisit the issue with the view to developing legislation for those jurisdictions which are yet to implement container deposit schemes.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that the revised Australian Packaging Covenant include improved reporting and compliance by industry.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the meeting of environment ministers working group, engage with states and territories to improve enforcement of the Australian Packaging Covenant.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that the Department of the Environment give consideration to recognising the role of product stewardship in the Threat Abatement Plan by including reference to the Australian Packaging Covenant

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that the review of the Australian Packaging Covenant include support for the development innovative packing solutions that offer alternatives to plastics.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 21

The committee recommends that the Australian Government support states and territories in banning the use of single-use lightweight plastic bags. In doing so, the Australia Government should ensure that alternatives do not result in other pollutants entering the environment.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 22

The committee recommends that the Australian Government move to immediately ban the importation and production of personal care products containing microbeads.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 23

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the meeting of environment ministers working group, identify measures, including regulatory measures, already available to prevent plastics entering the marine environment and ensure that they are being implemented effectively in all jurisdictions. In particular, the committee recommends that more effective enforcement of environmental laws in relation to preventing nurdles entering the waste management system be pursued.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.