



CTA-076-Drowning in Plastic-World's Oceans

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The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation
Vic Ferguson Executive Director

281.971.7703
512.986.1902

P.O. Box 311117
vic.ferguson@wfcrc.org

Houston, TX 77231
info@wfcrc.org

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PLASTIC POLLUTION

Oceans Deeply Talks: Drowning in Plastic

Oceans Deeply talks with experts about the plastic pollution that's threatening the ocean: What we know, what we don't know and, crucially, what we can do about it.



WRITTEN BY [Ian Evans](#)
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An endangered monk seal resting on a tangled web of fishing gear and marine debris. NOAA

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In our latest Oceans Deeply Talks, community editor Ian Evans is joined by journalist [Erica Cirino](#), a frequent contributor to Oceans Deeply, and Keith Cialino, the northeast regional coordinator for the [marine debris program](#) at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), to discuss marine plastic pollution.

While aboard a marine research vessel recently, Cirino spotted plastic debris 2,000 miles (3,200km) from shore. However, much of the plastic that flows into the ocean disappears from sight as it breaks down into tiny bits known as microplastics and even smaller pieces, not visible to the eye, called nanoplastics. Cirino witnessed scientists pulling up shards of plastic from 650ft (200m) below the surface of the sea. This, she says, means we may have “grossly underestimated” the amount of plastic in the ocean.

Cialino has seen similar plastic pollution off the east coast of the United States. Derelict fishing gear is particularly problematic because marine animals often die from eating it or becoming entangled in fishing lines and nets.

How microplastics and nanoplastics affect animal and human health is not well understood. These tiny pieces of plastics can be vehicles for viruses, bacteria and toxins. The particles are eaten by fish, which can end up on dinner plates. A recent United Nations report stated that [121 commercial seafood species have been found to ingest plastics](#).

“It is well known, though, that those chemicals cause serious health problems in animals and humans,” says Cirino. “So, the fact that these plastics are absorbing these chemicals is a huge concern for scientists.”

One solution is to prevent plastics from getting into the ocean. Cialino notes that cleaning up plastic pollution can boost local economies. NOAA’s Marine Debris Program, for instance, [pays fishers to collect abandoned fishing nets](#) that are then incinerated to produce energy or recycled into other products.

For additional reading see [The WFCRC Document Gallery](#) for articles about:

- Public Service Announcements (PSA)
- Coral Alert Network (CAN)
- Emergency Reporting Reports (ERR)
- Call to Action (CTA)
- Marine Protected Areas (MPA)
- Marine Life Alert (MLA)
- Seismic and Oil Production Threats
- Natural Science Reports (NSR)
- Oil Spill Alerts (OSA)
- And other miscellaneous documents

Comment from Director of The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation (WFCRC): WFCRC is now a participant in the Ocean Guardians program for the Cook Islands to clean up plastic in the ocean and turn plastic into fuel. As this program has worldwide implications in that we need support from all concerned citizens and from concerned organizations from all corners of the globe. This will be the first program ever to combine a humanitarian

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effort to bring health care, education, regrowth, plastic removal from the ocean, a conservation plan for coral reefs and coastal environments. With emphasis on sharing information and promoting human welfare and wellbeing for local stakeholders.

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