

Marine

Litter Watch

Newsletter

Issue 14 - Spring 2021



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk





Hello and Welcome to the Spring 2021 edition of Marine Litter Watch

by Lisa Maitland, Marine and Fisheries Division, DAERA

Welcome to the Spring 2021 edition of Marine Litter Watch. I should begin by introducing myself as a new member of the Marine Strategy and Licensing Team. Having previously worked in DAERA in the Carrier Bag Levy Team, I have included an article in this edition on the levy and the work I was involved in.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed by sending articles, news and updates and helped me with my first edition. Our cover image was provided by Gary Burrows, the photo is of a seal pup Gary and the team rescued from a discarded fishing net.

Any future articles and updates are always greatly received, if you would like to contribute to Marine Litter Watch you can email me at Lisa.Maitland@daera-ni.gov.uk

Article Summary

In this edition our first article is from Jasper Hamlet from FIDRA. Jasper gives an update on the Great Nurdle Hunt and the worldwide programme uncovering the problem of Nurdles.

Our next article from Ciara Laverty of Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful introduces us to the 'Adopt a Spot' programme and a family of volunteer 'Adopt a Spotters', doing their bit to clear litter from our local beaches.

Claire Hudson of Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful provides an update on the recently published Litter Composition Analysis, highlighting the serious issue of litter through this new report. Claire also talks about the recent survey on Perceptions of Single Use Plastics.

Finally as a former colleague of the DAERA Carrier Bag Levy Team, I give you a bit of background to the Carrier Bag Levy and how it impacts on Marine Litter.



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Covid Waste

Lisa Maitland, Marine and Fisheries.

When editing my first edition of Marine Litter Watch I could not have imagined the impact that Covid would have on our environment as well as health. Disappointingly 'Covid Waste' has become an unwelcome addition to the numerous items, and in particular plastic, that make up our marine litter.

The war on plastic waste in our seas is an ongoing struggle. We are all too familiar with the plastic bottles, straws, disposable cups and cutlery which regularly appear on our beaches. When looking back on previous editions of Marine Litter Watch we can read about the success stories of the good work the public, government and local organisations continue to do to fight the plastic blight of marine litter.

Unfortunately the Covid pandemic has another casualty in the form of

the environment. As early as June 2020 the negative environmental impact of Covid 19 started to emerge. Conservationists have warned that the coronavirus pandemic could spark a surge in ocean pollution. Further adding to the glut of plastic waste that already threatens marine life.



In France divers discovered "Covid Waste" in the form of dozens of gloves, masks and bottles of hand sanitiser beneath the waves of the Mediterranean. Mixed in with the

usual litter of disposable cups and aluminum cans, disposable masks were found floating like jellyfish and waterlogged latex gloves scattered across sea beds. Images are also already beginning to surface of marine life impacted by this 'covid waste' with sea birds becoming entangled in disposable masks and gloves. It appears our fear has led to poor disposal habits.

It's not just the impact of an increase in the use and poor disposal of single use plastic Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) but also the shift of many back to single use plastics in our everyday life. The threat of the virus has meant many people feel 'safer' buying pre packed food or using disposable cups and cutlery rather than using a reusable alternative.

There has been a sharp increase in the usage of wipes, with reports of discarded wipes appearing on Northern Ireland beaches. Local groups doing beach cleans have

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noted a rise in the amount gathered along shorelines. Now more than ever it's important we don't slip back to bad habits. If we have to use wipes, we should dispose of these responsibly. Wipes are harmful to the marine environment and can cause major blockages in our sewage system. NI Water continues to support the 'When is it fine to flush?' campaign which encourages manufacturers and the public to think about safe disposal of wipes.

With disposable masks often containing polypropylene a plastic which can have a lifespan of up to 450 years it's important we act now. Where possible use a reusable alternative, in line with Government guidelines, that can easily be washed. This small act of reuse could reduce the amount of PPE to be disposed. If disposing of single use masks, gloves or other PPE do this responsibly in an appropriate bin and help protect our environment.

Leading the way in recycled packaging

Introducing a world first - a Coke bottle made with plastic from the sea.

Coca-Cola is unveiling its first ever sample bottle made using 'recovered and recycled marine plastics'. This demonstrates that one day even ocean debris could be used in recycled packaging for food or drinks.

About 300 bottles have been produced using 25% recycled marine plastic, retrieved from the

Mediterranean Sea and beaches. A small step for now, but the technology behind it has big implications.

Coastal clean ups: the marine plastic contained in the bottles was collected and recovered by volunteers. 84 beach cleans took place in Spain and Portugal across 12 ports as part of the "Circular Seas" project.

The collaboration is between the Coca-Cola system in Iberia, Spain's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and the Environment and three leading non-profit organisations.



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Nestlé creates market for food-grade recycled plastics

Nestlé announced that it will invest in leading the shift from virgin plastics to food-grade recycled plastics. This builds on its 2018 commitment to make 100% of its packaging recyclable or reusable by 2025.

Nestlé will reduce its use of virgin plastics by one third whilst working with others to advance the circular economy and endeavour to clean up plastic waste from oceans, lakes and rivers.



Counting the cost of disused fishing gear.

The Marine Litter Team are undertaking an audit on disused fishing gear located at the fishing harbours in Northern Ireland. It is part of a British Irish Council wide initiative to look at the potential for recycling disused fishing gear.



Fishing gear has been highlighted in the Single Use Plastics Directive as a 'particularly serious problem in the context of marine litter'.

DAERA is working with local harbour authorities and colleagues in fisheries

to assess and quantify any disused fishing gear in and around the harbours.

The Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority has already delivered a project where a collection of disused fishing nets were sent to Denmark and recycled into Lego.

Why Straws Suck?

Plastic straws are in the top ten items picked up on beaches and it's not hard to see why. We use straws for around twenty minutes before we toss them away, which is an astonishingly quick lifespan for an item that could be on the planet forever.

It is extremely wasteful to manufacture and distribute such vast volumes of plastic designed to be used for just a matter of minutes. As straws are of a lightweight nature large numbers of them inevitably end up in the sea too.

Plastic straws in the oceans are bad news for marine wildlife and are often

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mistaken for food by seabirds and fed to their chicks. They are also sucked up by fish and marine mammals when they're feeding.

Plastic straws are to be banned across EU countries following the plans set out in the Single Use Plastics Directive. In NI many local businesses are already taking the lead in switching to more environmentally sustainable alternatives. Laverys Belfast has already made the switch to 100% biodegradable straws. The Sunflower Bar and Made in Belfast have also got on board with the 'pass on straws movement' by switching to biodegradable and compostable alternatives.



Within the next year we hope to see an end to the plastic straw culture here in NI.

Businesses Tackling Plastic Waste in NI

Can I get a Refill?

Refill shops are the latest fight in the war against plastic packaging and food waste. These zero waste shops are popping up around Northern Ireland. New businesses have opened on the Belmont Road, Belfast and Bridge Street, Banbridge. The idea behind these shops is that customers bring their own containers to refill with the amount they require. This limits food waste and cuts out the packaging waste completely.

Similar businesses have opened in other parts of the UK and Asda has announced their intention to open a 'Sustainability Store' where shoppers can fill their own containers with food.

These 'scoop style' shops were once commonplace on the High Street and offered unpackaged goods for sale to be purchased by weight.

The "buy what you need" approach is a more sustainable way of shopping and with more stores proposed in NI in the next year, it is hoped this 'old fashioned shopping style' will become the modern approach.



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'Ahoy Poly-mer' on the 'Vitamin Sea'!

To raise awareness of plastic in our Rivers and Oceans, Hubbub along with local schools and businesses in London have created the first ever punts to be made from 99% plastic. These Punts are known as the Polymer, 'Pet-Project' and 'Vitamin Sea'.

Hubbub got involved in Plastic Fishing a project which combines sightseeing whilst cleaning London's canals. 8000 PET plastic bottles were used to develop the punts.

The boats have been developed with a traditional design.

However, they use a thoroughly modern material; 100% recycled plastic waste known as Plaswood.

This is the first time it has been used for boat building.

Each time the punts go Plastic Fishing they collect more bottles from the Docklands which are recycled to make more punts; the perfect circular economy.

Not only are the boats helping to remove plastic from the rivers, they are also educating their volunteers. To date, over 1,600 people have been Plastic Fishing, collecting over 1,901 plastic bottles from London's Docklands and 200 kg of recyclable plastic.

Furthermore after plastic fishing, 90% of participants pledged not to buy a plastic bottle for a month.



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Pellet pollution and The Great Nurdle Hunt's worldwide program to uncover the problem *by Jasper Hamlet, FIDRA*

In Memory

It is with great sadness that prior to publication we learned of the untimely and sudden death of Jasper Hamlet from FIDRA. Jasper contributed to this edition with his article on Nurdles and his enthusiasm for his work was evident throughout. Upon FIDRA's advice we are publishing his article and would like to dedicate this edition to Jasper and extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and all who worked with him at FIDRA. Jasper's legacy lives on in all who knew him, worked with him and in his valuable work and contribution to FIDRA.

Heard of a nurdle?

Thousands of people across the world have. They scour beaches for lentil-sized plastic pellets and report their finds to The Great Nurdle Hunt. During the first ever Great Global Nurdle Hunt event in 2019, hundreds

of community groups and individuals took part in a global search across 34 countries, from the Galapagos Islands to Galloway, supported by organisations across the globe.

A petit-pois sized pollutant

Nurdles are the raw material of the plastics industry that make up nearly all our plastic products. Spills occur at all stages of the manufacturing process, from production to conversion, and during transit, storage and shipping.

If not contained or cleaned up properly, these microplastic pellets make their way into the environment. At 2-5mm in size, they are almost impossible to clean up once on our beaches and spotting them is a challenge too! They are often being overlooked in beach cleans and surveys.



Nurdles



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Causeway Coast?

So far, pellet pollution along the Northern Ireland coastline is relatively unknown. At the end of 2019, there were three submissions to The Great Nurdle Hunt's online map, registering only a few polluting pellets. In contrast, across the North Channel in Dumfries and Galloway thousands of nurdles have been found. By surveying beaches, valuable data on the extent of the issue is gathered. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council have led the hunt in Northern Ireland and are supporting those keen to get involved along their coastlines.

Valuable data that really helps

Behind the scenes, FIDRA has been working with other NGOs, industry and governments to develop a framework to prevent the loss of nurdles at source. The initiative is a call for the whole plastics supply chain to

handle pellets responsibly. Evidence collected by nurdle hunt volunteers is vital to show how this pollutant is widespread.

FIDRA's work so far wouldn't have been possible without the time given by dedicated beach-goers hunting for nurdles. Every year FIDRA asks more people to head out to their local beach or waterway and search for

nurdles. It's easy, fun and contributes valuable data to a global picture of nurdle pollution.

This year's Great Global Nurdle Hunt is proposed to take place from 1st-31st October 2021.

Join the worldwide nurdling network by visiting www.nurdlehunt.org.uk.



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Adopt a Spot *by Ciara Laverty, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful.*

Contact: ciara.laverty@keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org

Is there an area near you that could use a bit of TLC? Could you commit to carrying out just four clean ups a year? Then get involved in Live Here Love Here's Adopt A Spot programme!

Adopt a Spot is a scheme that enables volunteers across Northern Ireland to adopt an area and look after it. Adopters can be anyone, from families, community or youth groups,

schools, businesses and sporting associations. Live Here Love Here will provide groups with an adoption pack containing all the equipment you need, including a hints and tips booklet on how to run a successful clean up.

Your spot can be as big or as small as you want it to be. It could be a mile of beach that always seems to be

full of litter, an urban park, your local forest....anywhere is possible!

"We got involved with Adopt a Spot because I had taken part in several other beach cleans within the area. I was shocked at the amount of rubbish on our shores and the effect it was having on our sea life. I looked into local areas that were available to adopt and decided on Minerstown Beach as it is a Seal Conservation Area and would greatly benefit from the beach cleans. The application was done online, it was very simple and I was given all of the tools and information needed to start my beach cleans.

I hope to see more people getting involved in this great initiative... Even when you go for a walk on the beach, bring a bag with you." Collect some rubbish along the way, every effort no matter how small helps!"

(Lesley Forward).

If you would like more information on the Adopt A Spot programme, contact Ciara Laverty on 028 9073 6920 or ciara.laverty@keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org



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Litter Composition Analysis Report 2019/20 by Claire Hudson, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful.

Contact: Claire.hudson@keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful have been busy during the last few months with new publications. The first report in this article looks at the Litter Composition Analysis Report which summarises key findings of litter found on the streets of Northern Ireland. The second publication is The Perceptions of Single Use Plastic Survey completed recently and designed to give an idea of awareness and attitudes on single use plastics.

Litter Composition Analysis Report 2019/20 - A First for Northern Ireland

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and DAERA commissioned an independent litter compositional analysis to alert both the general public and business community to the seriousness of our litter problem - no similar study has been conducted in Northern Ireland to date. It demonstrates that litter is reaching concerning levels – polluting our forests, parks, beaches and streets.

Headline Figures

The study took place between January - March 2019 and was undertaken by RPS Consulting Engineers. The Litter Composition Analysis Report states that nearly **1.3 million** litter items are on our streets at any one time, weighing approximately **28 tonnes**. The cost of this to the public purse is an estimated **£45 million** annually.

The Perturbing 3 Ps.

The Report highlights that a significant amount of the litter found contained plastic. Of this litter;

- **71%** comprised of cigarette butts, confectionary, crisp wrappers and plastic bottles.
- The second most common category was metals at **14.5%**, this mostly consisted of non-alcoholic drinks packaging (drinks and cans).
- Paper was the third most common category at **9.7%**, with cigarette packaging, scratch cards, till receipts and bank statements most prominent.



- **47.8%** of all items found were packaging related and **52.2%** non-packaging items.

A Time to Act

We all have a part to play in tackling this litter problem. We can all make a difference. Now is the time to act and change our behaviour. In the words of David Attenborough;

"I do truly believe that, together, we can create a better future. If we make the right decisions at this critical moment, we can safeguard our planet's ecosystems, its extraordinary biodiversity and all its inhabitants. What happens next is up to every one of us."

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Contact: Claire.hudson@keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org

The full report can be read on the Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful website – <https://keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.etinu.net/keepnorthernirelandbeautiful/documents/blog-000968-20200228111517.pdf>

Perceptions of Single Use Plastic Survey 2020

In June 2020 Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and DAERA commissioned a survey on Perceptions of Single Use Plastic. Participants were from a range of demographics. Questions were designed to give an idea of awareness and attitudes on single use plastics, as well as solutions to the problem. The survey had some interesting results and has provided an insight into how the Northern Ireland public perceive Single Use Plastics.

Below is a flavour of the findings;

- Over four fifths of the NI population were aware of the term 'Single Use

Plastics'

- Awareness was highest among 50-64 year olds (88%).
- Almost 9 in 10 (87%) felt the closest definition of Single Use Plastics was 'plastic items that you would normally use only once.'
- This figure peaked at 94% among those aged 65+.
- Although people are aware of the term Single Use Plastic there is still considerable confusion of how it is defined
- If messages surrounding the definition of Single Use Plastic are not simple and straightforward then this could confuse people.
- Almost 9 in 10 (88%) of the population considered Single Use Plastics to be either a 'very or quite significant' problem.
- Over 2 in 5 (41%) perceived the long-term environmental damage Single Use Plastics can cause, to be biggest problem.

Lasting images

Overall and encouragingly Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful found that people are aware of the issues surrounding Single Use Plastics and agree that it is a significant problem. There is a view that Single Use Plastics take many years to break down and many feel that, in fact, they may remain in our ecological system in perpetuity.

In addition, the damage that Single Use Plastics do to local wildlife has become well documented and highly salient for the majority of people surveyed. Images of wildlife having ingested plastic and the effect it has on them remain clear in the collective consciousness of our population – Blue Planet 2 is well recalled.

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Carrier Bag Levy *by Lisa Maitland, Marine Strategy and Licencing Team.*

Contact: Lisa.Maitland@daera-ni.gov.uk

The levy so far.....

The Carrier Bag Levy was introduced across Northern Ireland in April 2013. Since introduction the levy has already delivered the removal of over **1 billion bags** from circulation thereby reducing the number of bags littering our streets, public spaces and marine environment. The levy in Northern Ireland is the most extensive of any of the carrier bag charging arrangements in the UK and has generated in excess of **£28 million pounds**.

Through DAERA this money has contributed towards a full range of local environmental projects. These include anti-litter and waste monitoring and reduction projects as well as strategic schemes that protect and enhance our habitats, health and wellbeing, and water quality.

Cutting Our Usage

The aim of the carrier bag levy is to reduce the number of bags in



The devastating consequences of plastic bags.

circulation and help the environment by reducing the amount going to landfill or ending up as litter in our seas. Our over consumption and excessive production of short lived disposable items led to the need for a levy to be implemented in Northern Ireland. It is estimated that prior to the levy Northern Ireland used on average 300 million bags per year. By adding a cost to the bag the levy was designed,

to encourage shoppers to reuse their own bags therefore promoting a significant reduction in bag usage.

Marine Litter – story of a bag

Plastic bags contribute between 0.1-1 percent of visible litter in the UK with around 2 percent ending up on our beaches. (The Great British Beach Clean, Marine Conservation Society 2019)

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Contact: Lisa.Maitland@daera-ni.gov.uk

Although this may seem small, they are a highly visible form of litter which can take hundreds of years to break down. Marine life often mistake them for food and we are now all too familiar with the ever emerging pictures of whales washed ashore with copious amounts of bags in their stomachs. The introduction of the levy provided a much needed message about how a small change in purchasing and disposal behaviours could quickly deliver a large change for the environment.



Where are we now?

We can and need to do more in continuing to manage our usage and disposal of carrier bags.

It is hoped in the future that DAERA can do more to extend the Carrier Bag Levy policy and further drive down our usage of Carrier Bags in Northern Ireland.

We are now into the 7th year of the levy and with the ever prevalent focus on single use plastic and the effects on our seas and marine life, the carrier bag levy can help in the fight in tackling plastic pollution. You can do your bit by remembering to bring a bag when out shopping and reusing this as often as possible.

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