



Community Beach Clean-up on Mahia Peninsula.

Heralding the start of a new decade, communities on the edge of the Mahia Peninsula were inspired by a young, dynamic New Zealand charity, to clean up their beaches. Sustainable Coastlines www.sustainablecoastlines.org initiated an event that covered 270kms of the East Coast, from Te Araroa in the north to Mahia in the south. In total nearly 12 tonnes of rubbish was picked up by hundreds of volunteers on Saturday 2nd January.

Nick Chapman, Principal of Nuhaka School, co-ordinated the clean up around Mahia and was delighted with the results. "I was able to identify key persons in each of the main beach areas - Nuhaka (Denise Raroa and Alison Maru), Opoutama (Julie Battes), Mahanga (Lis Battes), Mahia beach (Jo Hedley and Jocelyn Zame) and at Whangawehi (Waiwhakaata Greening and Rae TeNahu) and along with their communities gathering around and networking with holidaymakers they came to the party as the ultimate volunteers for such a great cause. Co-ordinating with Gisborne and these volunteer groups worked out very successfully - thanks to everyone involved again - especially those that took up the mantle to co-ordinate their areas."

The communities of Opoutama, Mahanga, Mahia Beach, Te Mahia and Whangawehi all participated and many were surprised just how much rubbish there was! Age was no barrier to getting involved, with volunteers ranging in age from 1 to 77, new friendships were formed and a real community spirit prevailed.

Here on the East Coast we are incredibly fortunate to enjoy some of the most pristine beach environments and clean seas on the planet – but how long will this last? 8000 kms away on the diagonally opposite side of the Pacific Ocean a gigantic soup of plastic rubbish the size of Texas is slowly circulating to the NE of Hawai'i. Caught in the centre of the North Pacific Gyre, a vast swirling vortex of ocean currents, the waste is drawn in from all over the ocean to form the biggest rubbish dump in the world.

It is estimated that pieces of plastic in the area outweigh surface zooplankton, the tiny animals forming the base of the marine food web, by six to one.

Think twice before tossing any rubbish on the ground and in particular plastics, which are now virtually everywhere in our society – take a look around your home and count what is made of plastic, you'll be amazed! Their durability and stability which makes them so useful to us are the very qualities that make them so harmful to marine creatures. Petro-chemical based plastics are non-biodegradable, so, *"Every little piece of plastic manufactured in the past 50 years that made it into the ocean is still out there somewhere,"* says Tony Andrady, a chemist with the US-based Research Triangle Institute.

They may not be bio-degradable, but they are photo-degradable meaning that over time sunlight breaks them down into ever smaller fragments and eventually plastic dust. These small fragments are mistaken for food by marine creatures - many of which are low down the food chain causing higher and higher concentrations to accumulate near the top - ultimately ending up on your dinner table in your tuna bake!

Dead seabirds have been found with their stomachs full of bottle tops, cigarette lighters, toothbrushes and balloons. Adults will regurgitate plastics into their young killing them.

Plastic bags are serial killers to marine life. The fish, whale, turtle or bird that ingests the bag dies and decomposes around the bag which then floats off ready for its next victim.

Each one of us is in a powerful position to take responsibility for our actions if we remember that –

Plastics don't Pollute - People Pollute

These volunteer groups around the Nuhaka and Mahia areas have made a stand and assisted in a very effective and successful local cleanup. Many thanks to Bob and Colleen Wesche for co-ordinating the rubbish removal from the beach drop zones.

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