



Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

Summary in English

Shaving cream for the fish

A report about marine litter
– sources problems and solutions

About the report

On October 16, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation released a report on marine litter called “Shaving cream for the fish: about marine litter– sources problems and solutions”. As well as a review of the problems, the report presents measures to reduce the amount of litter in the ocean. The measures address both visible waste (macro litter) and invisible waste (micro litter). In addition, the report includes results from a sample study of beauty products in Swedish shops. The study found microplastics in makeup, toothpaste, shaving cream, and cleaning products from a number of known producers and in a large number of stores.

Summary

People add at least 6.4 million tons of waste to our oceans each year. Of this, about 70 percent sinks, about 15 percent ends up on beaches, and about 15 percent floats around in the open sea. Marine litter, which consists mainly of plastic, is harmful to both people and animals. For people, marine litter is partly an aesthetic problem; polluted beaches are just ugly. In addition, it costs the community money in the form of reduced revenue from tourism, as well as the cost of cleaning up. Fishing boats also suffer economic losses when nets fill up with debris or equipment is damaged. For marine life, waste has other effects entirely. Fish, seabirds, marine mammals, and sea cucumbers eat or become caught in litter, and die of starvation or choking. More subtle and still largely unexplored harm to animals includes being poisoned, either because the waste itself is toxic, or because it transfers toxins into the animals.

Some sources of marine waste are still not fully understood, for example, how much and which microplastics and fibers accompany wastewater out to lakes and oceans. We must also learn more about the sources of the many small, so-called black particles found in the ocean. In any case, one thing is absolutely clear: pollution must be stopped at the source. Collecting waste from the water is only realistic for macro-waste that washes ashore. But it is needlessly expensive and only solves a fraction of the problem. The Society for Nature Conservation therefore believes that:

- Swedish authorities should collect more information about marine waste in our oceans, and identify its sources;
- the government should set a national goal and advocate for an EU target of cutting the amount of marine waste by at least half by 2021, when all EU maritime areas will have good environmental statues in accordance with the marine directive, and that
- Sweden should advocate for marine litter to be included and offset by all relevant laws and conventions at the EU and international levels.

Requirements must also be tightened for the offshore sources with which we are familiar, i.e., ports, merchant ships, fishing boats, and oil and gas platforms. The Society for Nature Conservation believes that:

- control and compliance of waste legislation in ports must be strengthened by imposing responsibility for waste management on port authorities;
- there must be clearer rules in the EU's directive on reception, so that all vessels pay for all waste management in ports jointly;
- to avoid loss of fishing gear and ghost fishing, maritime spatial planning should differentiate between fishing grounds for stationary equipment such as nets, cages and hooks, and for trawlers;
- Sweden should establish a smart, efficient system for fishermen, including recreational fishermen, to report loss of fishing gear, which should be followed up by annual dragging;
- the issue of synthetic rope and rope that breaks down and releases microplastic fragments should be recognized by fishing and merchant fleets, and appropriately offset.

Sewage treatment plants transfer a great deal of micro litter to the ocean. This applies to clothing fibers from washing machines, and to micro plastic particles from beauty products. The sample study that was done for this report showed that micro plastic particles are present in many beauty products, from a variety of different producers and shops. To contend with the amount of micro litter from land-based sources, the Society for Nature Conservation believes that:

- production and sales of consumer products with added microplastic particles should be banned in Sweden, the EU, and worldwide;
- manufacturers, resellers and consumers should avoid the sale and consumption of products with microplastics, and
- Swedish authorities should require sewage treatment plants and washing machine manufacturers to offset pollution from clothing fibers in lakes and oceans.

This will also require providing consumers who wish to opt out of products containing micro-waste with information about product contents. There should be legal requirements nationally and at EU level for all consumer goods, not just cosmetics, to display a clear list of contents on the packaging.

Many cigarette butts end up on our beaches and in our oceans. The cost to the environment and of cleaning up the butts is absurdly high. Butts also contain toxins. To reduce the number of cigarette butts in the ocean, the Society for Nature Conservation believes there should be heavy fines for littering cigarette butts.

In Sweden, there are currently about one hundred thousand pleasure boats that will have to be scrapped in the coming years. However, there is no system for recycling boats, which poses a risk of boats being abandoned and fragmented. To prevent that from happening, the Society for Nature Conservation believes that:

- small boats weighing less than 200 kg should be able to be left and recycled at recycling stations;

- an appropriate recycling system should be established for bigger boats in a partnership between authorities and industry organizations as soon as possible, and
- scrapping of newly built boats should be financed by the people who produce and buy boats today by incorporating producer responsibility in the Recreational Craft Directive.