



Discarded plastic killing our marine turtles

NEW research from the Earthwatch program Turtles in Trouble shows that 36 per cent of marine turtles are affected by marine rubbish, with soft plastic being the major villain.

Marine scientist Dr Kathy Townsend, of the University of Queensland, says the results of the project show the impact marine rubbish has in causing the death of turtles is more than 17 times higher than the two per cent

previously suggested.

"Turtles have been found to have eaten most plastic items, but the most common items eaten are soft plastics, such as plastic bags and lolly wrappers, and pieces of hard, broken-down plastic," Dr Townsend said.

"The ratio of soft plastics – plastic bags, bait bags and cling film – to hard plastics found in turtle gut contents compared to the ratio found in the environment was sig-

nificantly higher."

She said this indicated that turtles select soft plastics as food, as has been suggested anecdotally.

The executive director of Earthwatch Australia, Richard Gilmore, said the new research and the work of Dr Townsend highlighted the need for the community to be more aware of the impact of marine rubbish.

Earthwatch Australia will release its latest research at a

launch in Melbourne's Federation Square on Tuesday.



The most common items eaten are soft plastics such as plastic bags and lolly wrappers



Lana Frew from ARK animal hospital with green turtle Greenie and a plastic bag

Picture: PATRINA MALONE