



Our litter killing sea turtles

BALLOONS, plastic bags, nylon rope and even rubber thongs are providing a deadly diet for Australia's critically endangered sea turtle population, a new study shows.

On the eve of World Ocean Day, research by the Earthwatch program Turtles in Trouble has shown that 36 per cent of Australian sea turtles are affected by marine litter, with some 18,000 pieces of plastic litter floating

on every square kilometre of the world's oceans.

University of Queensland marine biologist Dr Kathy Townsend said the problem of marine waste had to be tackled before the already low population numbers of sea turtles became even more depleted.

"We are doing the inconceivable, we are starting to fill up the oceans of the world," she said.

The Turtles in Trouble

program found turtles had swallowed balloons, plastic bags, nylon rope, styrofoam and thongs, among other things, possibly mistaking them for jellyfish. Once ingested, the plastic causes a gut impaction which leads to the contents of the animal's gut decomposing.

It can result in so-called "floating syndrome", where the turtle may take months to starve to death.