



# Plastic litter torturing marine life



**COMMITTED:** Dr Kathy Townsend treats a turtle at the University of Queensland research station on Stradbroke Island

NEW research from the *Earthwatch* program *Turtles in Trouble* claims that 36 per cent of marine turtles are affected by marine rubbish and soft plastic is the major villain.

University of Queensland marine scientist Dr Kathy Townsend says the death of turtles from marine rubbish is more than 17 times higher than the 2 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 smaller 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

significantly higher." She said this indicated that turtles select soft plastics as food, which had previously been suggested anecdotally.

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.