



SOS for turtles in trouble

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

Research by the Earthwatch program Turtles in Trouble has shown that 36 per cent of Australian sea turtles are affected by marine litter.

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

She said the problem was everyone's responsibility.

"We need to stop generating so much waste," she said.

The program found tur-

tles had swallowed balloons, nylon rope and plastic bags, 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.

"The animal becomes positively buoyant and it can't dive down to eat, it can't get out of the way of predators, it can't get out of the way of boats, so it really is quite a tragic thing," Dr Townsend said.

She said everyone can do their share to help stop this.

"Start refusing those items that have a useful lifetime of only minutes and yet take years if not decades to degrade," she said.



Tragic waste: Marine litter – such as this plastic bag – is threatening sea turtle populations in Australia and worldwide, new research by an Earthwatch program has found.