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THE LIFECYCLE OF PLASTICS

Plastic. It's everywhere. It has only really existed for the last 60-70 years, but in that time plastic has transformed everything from packaging to product design and retailing.

One of the advantages of plastic is that it is designed to last, but this same blessing is a curse as nearly all the plastic ever created still exists in some form today.

Australia produces almost **3 million tonnes of plastic per annum**, of which less than **12%** is recycled. Alarmingly, up to 130,000 tonnes of that plastic will wind up in the ocean as plastic pollution each year. Considering each person produces (or uses) roughly 130kg of plastic, it means that about 30kg of each person's waste could end up in the ocean.

Not only could it end up in the ocean, but it can take hundreds of years to break down – if at all.

Plastic bag - 20 years

Plastic bags pose one of the greatest impacts to ocean wildlife. Even though they only make up a small percentage of our litter, they can break up into smaller and smaller pieces - having devastating impacts on our wildlife.

Takeaway coffee cups - 30 years



Did you know that if we lined up all the takeaway coffee cups used each year in Australia they would stretch around the world... twice! That's a lot of coffee cups. Unfortunately, many of these cups are not recyclable due to the plastic membrane that lines them, and can take up to 30 years to degrade.

Plastic straws - 200 years

Plastic straws can take up to 200 years to decompose. Choose a paper straw or ditch them altogether and try the age-old sipping technique.

6 pack plastic rings - 400 years

When these plastic rings end up in the ocean, they can be devastating to our marine wildlife who get entangled.

Plastic bottles - 450 years



Plastic water bottle © Greg Armfield

The energy required to produce and transport plastic water bottles could fuel an estimated 1.5 million cars for a year, yet approximately 75% of water bottles are not recycled - they end up in landfills, litter roadsides, and pollute waterways and oceans.

Plastic cups - 450 years

The chemical bonds of plastic cups make them durable, but also resistant to breaking down. Overtime, these cups release toxic chemicals into the environment and are more likely to be ingested by vulnerable marine wildlife.

Disposable diapers - 500 years

Disposable diapers need to be exposed to oxygen and sunlight in order to decompose, and they don't decompose well in landfill. Once in landfill, they can contaminate groundwater, posing serious threats to the environment. Opt for reusable cloth diapers or [eco-friendly alternatives](#).

Coffee pods - 500 years



The plastic in coffee pods takes more than 500 years to break down, releasing harmful amounts of methane gas as it does so. Steer clear of pod coffee machines. Or use [recycled pods](#).

Plastic toothbrush - 500 years

3.5 billion toothbrushes are sold worldwide each year. Most get lost in the recycling process and end up in landfill or make their way into rivers and oceans. These toothbrushes are made from polypropylene plastic and nylon and can take up to 500 years or more to decompose.

The good news is that we can fight back against plastic pollution. Every little action we take to reduce our consumption of plastic is a big step in protecting the future of our planet and our precious wildlife.

Check out these [plastic free eco-friendly swaps](#) on our blog.