



*Our country. Our future.*

# CLEANER BEACHES

## Understanding marine debris



*Capricorn Coast residents have been learning more about the rubbish that arrives on their shores while helping keep local beaches beautiful.*

### Volunteers keep beaches beautiful

Forty locals volunteered at a series of clean-up events held at beaches including One Mile, Farnborough and Nine Mile, in the Shoalwater and Corio Bay region, about 50km north of Rockhampton. Shoalwater and Corio Bays are internationally important wetland areas.

Volunteers rolled up their sleeves to collect bags of debris washed onto beaches such as pieces of plastic, thongs, and old fishing gear.

They learnt more about marine debris - discovering that much of the junk travels on oceanic currents from just around Rockhampton and Gladstone, and heard about the effects it can have on marine wildlife and coastal habitats.

Volunteer and Yeppoon local Alison Long said she feels it's important for everyone to do their bit to help preserve our coastal areas.

"There was certainly a big variety of rubbish along the beach - you just want to remove it all," Allison said. "These pretty places won't be around if we don't look after them. If we don't change our behaviour, we're going to lose a lot of marine life and the beaches might become hazardous to use," she said.

### Sources of debris

Participants were given tips on how to minimise their household waste to prevent further rubbish entering stormwater systems and ending up in the ocean and coastal environments.

Through Caring for our Country funding, Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) worked with Greening Australia to organise the clean-up activities, as part of a broader project to engage the community in protecting wetlands and improve understanding of the sources and movement of marine debris.

Previous rubbish tracking studies have shown that debris entering the water near the mouth of the Fitzroy River and the

port of Gladstone and its mooring facilities, travels north and washes ashore on the northern beaches of the Capricorn Coast due to currents and the shape of the coastline.

The rubbish collected during the nine clean-up events run by FBA this year were sent to CQ University to support ongoing research being done to determine the source of debris and identify trends in where debris lands along the central Queensland coastline.

Data about local debris is also added to the Australian Marine Debris Initiative's database, which helps identify Australia-wide trends and provides a tool to educate community and industry about addressing the sources of harmful debris.

### Supporting shorebird research

Local data will also help CQ University inform research into plastic consumption by sea birds and other marine life. For example, through previous debris analysis they found that while the majority of plastic found in the ocean is white, sea birds are mainly eating yellow or green plastics.

This insight, and others gained from thinking about where and how rubbish originates, may provide the key to ensuring the protection of special species and places like Corio and Shoalwater Bays.

