

As a Fisheries biologist I am deeply concerned about the effect that plastic pollution has on the marine and freshwater environments and all the organisms that live within the aqueous environment. When plastics were first developed, they were sighted as a solution to the effects that human consumption had on products like wood and cotton. Plastics were revolutionary as they did not break down. Unfortunately, the fact that plastics do not break down is one of main problems with their use today. Most products that contain plastic or plastic fibers end up being used in consumable good, everything from polyester added to clothes to bottles, cling wrap and the like. All these manufactured goods have made life considerably easier for society.

However, non-biodegradability and disposability has become a big problem. The worlds scientists and researchers have been studying the effect of plastics for more than 20 years. Each investigation has always discussed the problems with accumulation of these plastics in the environment and increasing effect they have on all life on this planet. These concerns have only recently been brought to the general public knowledge. Even more important is the fact that most of the plastics that go into recycling programs never get recycled but get shipped to other counties to be burned.

Most of my life I lived in Southwestern Ontario. Many years ago, Ontario initiated a blue box program. It was limited at first and as the years of the program continued it became easier and less complicated for people to use the blue bins. It was very good. By the time I left Ontario for a new life in "Clean BC" the program had 2 recycling streams, if it was plastic, glass or tin it went in on stream, if it was made of paper in went into another stream. I was excited to move to BC where everything was more connected to nature. However, I was extremely surprised when I arrived in small town Northern BC to find out there was no blue bin program at all. There is a location where you can take tins, plastic bottles and glass to be recycled but you must place them in trays when you arrive.

I work for a First Nation and they are deeply concerned about the impact that plastic pollution has on the marine environment and the resources they rely on for sustenance. Below are some of the concerns I have heard from the community.

1) How concerned are you about plastic pollution

- answers ranged from very worried to extremely worried. There is no recycling program in the community and the recycling in the nearest town is not advanced, difficult to reach and time consuming to perform necessary activities to recycle.
- Concerned about the amount of plastics that get into the foods they are consuming and the potential health risks that could result.
- Concerned about the effect on sustainability of the resources. Feel that many animals may die before reproduction or not be able to reproduce due to amounts of plastics in the environment.

2) What are some barriers to recycling?

- no access to recycling facility, time consuming to sort and stack the containers at the nearest recycling depot, uncertain what can be recycled and what cannot, washing containers and removing labels is too laborious to make it worth while, no point since most of it ends up in landfills anyway or shipped to another country for burning

3) What would help you to recycle more?

- Curbside pickup and processing, financial compensation for volume effort, ensuring more items are recycled, knowing that recycling efforts are making a difference, forcing producers of plastic products to invest in community clean up projects.

4) Would you like to see certain plastic banned for public consumption and when would you like to see single plastic products used?

- Most respondents would like to see all single use plastics banned, some would like to see manufactures be able to develop a recycling program for their plastic and have to report on how much was produced each year and how much recycling was processed and turned into reusable products, most felt that single use plastics should only be used for medical purposes and hygienic practises. Lots of people like the idea of plastics being turned into other items for use like, decking material, as an additive or substitution to road works, re-usable bags, and other long terms use products. Everyone stated that there was no reason to use new raw materials and things should be recycled over and over.

5) Would you like to see beverage container deposit fees increased?

- Most people said they would be more likely to consider returns if that got more money to do it. Some people stated that the money was not the issue and that it was more about taking care of the waste more appropriately and efficiently than is currently being done.

6) How important is it to you to purchase products made from recycled plastics and other materials. Even if it meant you needed to pay more money for it.

- Most elders (55+) did not want to spend more money on purchasing products and stated they would rather return to using paper bags and glass than plastic, some stated that the fact that the ability to recycle is not here it does not have an influence on the economic purchases they would make. Most adults (30-55) and almost all the youth (30-) stated that it was something very important to them to ensure that the environment was safe for the next generation and more sustainable to ensure the maintenance of the indigenous way of life

7) What change would make the largest difference for you when it comes to reducing plastic waste

- make it less available in the market place, have easy efficient recycling process, ensure that more of the plastic that makes it to be recycled actually gets recycled, go back to older materials for fishing nets, lures, floats , start recycling other items not just food consumables and government mandated regulations on industry so they must recycle the same amount of plastic they produce each year.