

bottle with crude oil (Bottled Water Alliance 2009). At a maximum, it is costing our future generations a clean environment.

Environment and wildlife

Our thirst for bottled water is also driving a dramatic rise in plastic rubbish globally. Plastic doesn't go away — it just breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces, either sitting in landfill or making its way out into our waterways. A study by Gründlingh (1989) found that rubbish dumped in Western Australia could end up on the east coast of South Africa, such is the persistent nature of the product.

Along that journey, wildlife, such as turtles and seabirds, often mistake plastic for food, with lethal consequences. Studies have shown that a high proportion (about 50 to 80 per cent) of sea turtles found dead are known to have ingested marine debris and a study of seabirds from the eastern North Pacific and tropical Pacific reported that 73 per cent of the species tested had ingested plastic (Blight and Burger 1997).

Australians alone purchase about 118 000 tonnes of plastic drink bottles a year, but only recycle 35

per cent of them. The 76 700 tonnes left behind either goes to landfill or ends up in our environment as rubbish. That is particularly obvious on Clean Up Australia Day each year when beverage container rubbish consistently turns up among the most common rubbish items found. In some states it can make up over a third of all rubbish found (Clean Up Australia 2009).

Solution

So what are the solutions? From an individual perspective we can simply stop buying bottled water. Get your reusable bottle and fill it up before you leave home, it is that simple. At a higher level, the introduction of a container deposit scheme at a national level is critical. In South Australia, where they already have a ten-cent deposit scheme in place, the recycling rates are much higher (74 per cent) and volunteers find many fewer plastic beverage containers in the environment there on Clean Up Australia Day each year than they do in other states.

Our addiction to bottled water is putting our environment at risk and putting a solid dent in the budget

of many families. If we are serious about protecting our environment for generations to come, bottled water has to become a thing of the past.

REFERENCES

- Blight, L. K. and Burger, A. E. 1997. Occurrence of plastic particles in seabirds from the Eastern North Pacific. *Marine Pollution Bulletin* **34**: 323–325.
- Bottled Water Alliance. 2009. <http://www.bottledwateralliance.com.au> (Downloaded 22 September 2009).
- Clean Up Australia. 2009. www.cleanup.org.au (Downloaded 22 September 2009).
- Gründlingh, M. L., 1989. Drift of the SAA Helderberg wreckage in the Indian Ocean. *South African Journal of Science* **85**: 209–211.
- Pacific Institute 2009. http://www.pacinst.org/topics/water_and_sustainability/bottled_water/bottled_water_and_energy.html (Downloaded 22 September 2009).

Ian Kiernan, AO, Chairman
*Clean Up Australia and
Clean Up the World,*
PO Box R725,
Royal Exchange NSW 1225,
Australia

VIEWPOINT

Desert Water

ABOUT water. The photo in my mind is of a pool of permanent water in the desert fringe (Mileura Station). It was (and still is) called; Poonthoon Pool (see backcover for a picture of Poonthoon Pool. The water is salty more so than some bores. The why doesn't matter. But it made a nice salty cup of tea, which some of the students in my company didn't finish drinking even though they agreed with me that had they made soup with it the salt would have been advantageous. I only asked, "Did the water boil?" Thus, it was safe to drink — even better with soup. In some cities in

Australia they are banning bottled water¹, because it is the most wasteful use of money and energy since the disposable razor. There are lessons to be learnt here. But, they are for you to evaluate.

On this field-trip into the desert fringe, I drank water from the French Alps: melt-water from pristine glaciers. Bottled. evian spelt in lower case — very *chic*. I also drank boiled water from Poonthoon Pool, which I could sell in France. Bottled: but best for soup.

Aah... economics with its entrepreneurial possibilities and unconscionable Carbon Footprints.

I also drank water the locals drink, I didn't even ask — just drank like them. Amazingly, I cannot recall the taste differences after the teabag had been infused. The moral, you tell me?

Graham R. Fulton
Associate Editor
Pacific Conservation Biology

¹Bundanoon, in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales recently voted to ban bottled water attracting worldwide attention. From a report by Rebecca Bruce aired on Radio National's AM programme on 9 July 2009.