



Report highlights major concerns in Sydney Harbour from microplastics pollutants

The Sydney Harbour Research Program today released the first information on microplastic abundance in Sydney Harbour showing some concerning results and the need for further research to ascertain the severity of the problem.

While going to great lengths not to pollute our precious waterway, it's everyday items such as clothing fibres and facial scrubs that contain these microplastics that people are unwittingly contributing to the marine environment. They are either tiny fragments of plastic less than 5mm in length or larger pieces that break down once they've entered the Harbour.

These tiny microplastics absorb pollutants and are then ingested by the marine life, that transfers contaminants through food webs. Though plastics degrade with time the exact scale is unknown. Studies suggest somewhere from 50 to hundred of years.

Director of the program, Professor Emma Johnston and her team were alarmed by what they have found in their initial research.

"Microplastics were found in sediments throughout Sydney Harbour and we observed animals ingesting them. This is the first information we have and it certainly warrants further research," Professor Johnston said.

Scientists from the Sydney Institute of Marine Science (SIMS) have teamed up to study the Harbour as part of a coordinated research project called the Sydney Harbour Research Program, which is the beneficiary of the upcoming fundraising event, Fantasea Harbour Hike to be held on Sunday 7 September.

Professor Johnston stated "Microplastics are an emerging threat that requires attention. The most globally abundant contaminants are plastics of which more than 280 million tonnes are produced each year. Plastics enter and persist in environments from the poles to the equator and down to the depths of the sea.

Although larger pieces of plastic can be removed by sewage treatment plants and stormwater filters, no existing filtration methods retain microplastics, so they continue to be released. This is concerning because laboratory trials overseas indicate this material is likely to be present in animal tissues and food webs.

"The lack of information was hindering management of the problem in busy harbours such as Sydney. Risk analysis cannot yet be applied to microplastics because we lack fundamental information about levels of contamination in habitats and the uptake or consequences of this material in natural systems such as the harbour, Professor Johnston said.

Help to ensure this vital research is ongoing, join Fantasea Harbour Hike, the major fundraising activity for SIMS, the premier research facility that is working to protect and preserve Sydney Harbour for future generations.

To be held on Father's Day Sunday 7 September, it is a 12km walk which starts at Kirribilli, then winds its way around the bays through the Sydney Harbour National Park and culminates with a marine-themed festival at the Chowder Bay finish line, home of SIMS' research centre.

Register now at www.harbourhike.com

**For more information, please contact:
Fantasea Harbour Hike –Scott Crebbin 0419 751 805**

Media note: *Australia produces >1.2 million tonnes of plastic each year and the Industry is worth \$32.5 billion annually, employs 85,000 people and represents 10% of Australian manufacturing activity (according to the plastics and chemical industry association PACIA).*

