

trash free **SEAS**

WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF A CUTTING-EDGE DIVE AGAINST DEBRIS PROGRAM AND A GLOBAL ALLIANCE FORMING TO TACKLE THE MARINE DEBRIS PROBLEM, WHAT'S NEXT IN THE DEBRIS BATTLE?

BY ANIA BUDZIAK, SCIENCE AND POLICY OFFICER, PROJECT AWARE FOUNDATION



Divers can play a major role in putting a stop to this type of senseless tragedy, but only if they're involved.

RECENTLY, A DRAMATIC RESCUE EFFORT MADE NATIONAL NEWS.

A 12-metre/40-foot gray whale was entangled in a giant fishing net off the coast of Dana Point, California, USA. It was the very same location where we were ready to begin the first Trash Free Seas Alliance meeting.

Off the coast, rescue workers struggling to free an entangled whale formed an ironic backdrop to the meeting as an alliance of leaders from industry, conservation and science prepared to discuss root causes of the marine debris epidemic threatening literally every ocean community worldwide.

Unfortunately, this kind of whale rescue effort is becoming more frequent. This entanglement marked the third such rescue effort in the area during April alone. We're disheartened, but not surprised. Marine debris makes its way to the sea every day, and the rising tide of trash in our ocean will not be stemmed with Band-Aids. Big, bold actions at all levels are needed.

Now, more than ever, divers can play a major role in addressing this issue. And because we can see, report, and do something about the debris underwater, we are uniquely positioned to put an end to the "out of sight out of mind" perception and influence the overdue change on land.

A Global Alliance Forms

There are no black-and-white, all-or-nothing solutions to the magnitude of the litter issues. There's no clear picture of the amount and types of trash affecting nearly every corner of our ocean planet. There's no single agency with the capacity to tackle this in its entirety. It's going to take effort at all levels — from the individual to the community to the halls of policy making — to reduce and better manage waste.

Over the past 20 years Project AWARE has mobilized thousand of divers and nondivers to remove trash from our ocean and waterways. But removal is just one part of the much-needed solution. What's really needed is to stop waste at its source.

So how do we do this? We roll up our sleeves, focus on tangible outcomes and form smart alliances to prevent trash from making its way into the ocean in the first place.

As a founding member of the Trash Free Seas Alliance, Project AWARE is proud to partner with Ocean Conservancy, who is spearheading the effort, in a one-of-a-kind initiative to prevent ocean trash.

The Alliance will work to seek greater understanding and scientific knowledge of the marine debris issue and aims to identify

opportunities for solutions that cut across all sectors of the economy and that drive action and foster innovation. It's driven by:

A Focus on Solutions: moving towards creative, bold and entrepreneurial solutions that eliminate trash in the ocean. Together, we'll collaborate to reduce and, when possible, reinvent products, policies and services that damage ocean ecosystems. We aim to bring the best thinking to the table and critically evaluate risks and benefits for achievable solutions with lasting results. We'll use advocacy, community engagement and innovation as critical forces.

Trust and Respect: The goal is to find productive ways forward and high impact solutions. The Alliance recognizes the importance of member independence and will strive to respectfully communicate in advance about any positions that individual members might take.

Definition of Success by Impact: To reduce and make continual progress toward eliminating ocean trash. The Alliance will measure the impact of joint initiatives, evaluate progress and share results in ways that accelerate future successes for the ocean.

This alliance is the dive community's critical seat at the table where policy and solutions are formed. Divers bring the missing underwater perspective to the problem, adding to the 360-degree



The path to an ocean free from marine debris begins with that first piece of trash picked from the beach.





view of the issue — a perspective currently out of sight to most individuals, industries and governments. Dive Against Debris actions, and what you do in your community to prevent trash, all form part of the solution.

It Takes a Community

Complex problems are not solved in isolation. Sitting at the table with influential parties is only part of the picture. It takes a global, concerted effort by everyone to make a shift. Dive professionals and AWARE leaders like you, teaching and leading from the front lines of your community, are an integral piece of the marine debris puzzle.

► Koh Tao, Thailand, Marine Debris Action Plan

On the small island of Koh Tao, dive leaders know that local government action on single-use plastic is unlikely. Instead they work with local businesses in a bid to reduce single-use plastic packaging. Nathan Cook and Crystal Dive Resort, Thailand, have an action plan to make some small changes on their island, changes that could make a big difference.

The first step is to promote eating in as the best option because no packaging is needed. “We also want shop owners to provide drinks in reusable bottles, and even provide water bottle refills instead of selling new bottles every time,” said Cook.

Next, they plan to start a Green Package Program for Koh Tao where a “user-pays” system is implemented through local restaurants. Many businesses don’t know what alternatives are out there and the biggest thing stopping them is the cost.

Restaurants who sign up to the Green Package Program will ask customers to pay for their packaging. The small fee will cover the restaurants cost to provide oxy-biodegradable alternatives. “We believe that if the consumer is adequately informed, they will accept those increased costs for the welfare of the planet,” added Cook.

“People are often happy to pay small amounts to be ‘eco.’ As a pilot program we hope it will catch on and in time spread across

New Executive Director Chosen to Lead Project AWARE Foundation

Project AWARE Foundation welcomes new Executive Director Alex Earl. A committed marine conservationist and enthusiastic diver, Earl draws on an extensive background in global nonprofit management, strategic planning, program development, campaigning, fundraising and business development in addition to his extensive cross-cultural and international experience. Earl brings a strong vision of the future to complement a proud environmental tradition entrenched both by the PADI organization and Project AWARE.

“My dive training took place in Whytecliff Park, the first Marine Protected Area in Canada, as well as the warm tropical waters of Puerto Galera, Philippines. Scuba diving clarified for me that marine conservation was my path, and soon my commitment to protecting our ocean planet was forged as a global executive at Sea Shepherd Conservation



Society,” says Earl.

“Nonprofit organizations have, over the past several years, found themselves increasingly allied with for-profit businesses to achieve their missions. But, it was the PADI organization that was way ahead

of the curve when it came to collaboration between the non-profit and for-profit sectors. Nearly 20 years ago, the PADI organization had the vision to create Project AWARE and nurture the relationship – long before marine conservation was in vogue. It was virtually unheard of at the time. Now, Project AWARE is helping change policy at the highest levels while giving divers a collective voice,” he states.

Earl’s background demonstrates his ability to combine solid business acumen with a passionate commitment to making a lasting difference in the health and well being of the ocean as well as the animals that live in it. He served on the Boards of Sea Shepherd Australia and Sea Shepherd United Kingdom and has participated in volunteer efforts with numerous ocean conservation and animal protection groups.



◀ The crew at Trawangan Dive on the Island of Trawangan in Indonesia gets everyone involved in their conservation efforts, especially their guests.

MY OCEAN SPOTLIGHT

Five AWARE Leaders Around the World

BY JOANNE MARSTON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PROJECT AWARE FOUNDATION

Project AWARE's My Ocean online community is buzzing with all the eco actions AWARE Leaders like you are taking every day. Each week, your underwater data collection efforts, photos, blogs and events are on display for the world to see. The underwater planet is buzzing with excitement and you're an inspiration. Others are seeing what is possible and what they can achieve. Here are just a few of the eco actions AWARE Leaders around the globe are taking to mobilize their local dive communities.

◀ TRAWANGAN DIVE, INDONESIA: PROJECTAWARE.ORG/DIVER/TRAWANGAN-DIVE

Based on the tropical island of Trawangan in Indonesia, there's no action too small for Trawangan Dive when it comes to involving their divers in the ocean protection cause.

From the creation of shark outfits and hats to donning shark shower caps and organizing shark trivia nights, the crew at Trawangan Dive knows how to have fun with customers and fight for the cause. “We're always looking at ways we can generate excitement with our divers. Inspiring them to take action for sharks is a perfect theme,” says Sarah Best, Manager at Trawangan Dive.

KENDRA BOLT, NEW YORK: PROJECTAWARE.ORG/DIVER/KENDRA-BOLT

Kendra Bolt loves a challenge. She also loves sharks, the ocean and running. She has combined her passions by making Project AWARE a Charity Partner for the ING New York City Marathon in November 2012. Her Project AWARE team will run to raise funds for ocean protection.

“I love sharks but the fight for their protection isn't just an emotional one. It's logical, it's empirical, and it's extremely important,” says Bolt.

Bolt, a PADI Divemaster, will lead the marathon team to the finish line and raise funds for shark protection. You can follow the Project AWARE marathon team and donate at www.runforsharks.org.

◀ SUNSHINE DIVERS, THAILAND: PROJECTAWARE.ORG/DIVER/SUNSHINE-DIVERS

PADI Course Director Natalie Hunt and PADI Instructor Sarah Van Name lead the PADI Divemaster Trainee program at Sunshine Divers on Koh Tao. The duo incorporates a full range of eco actions

into their divemaster training course.

Hunt and Van Name firmly believe in the eco training philosophy they have adopted. “All Divemaster Trainees take away key skills in marine debris removal and surveying, coral nursery management and maintaining mooring buoys, which they can use anywhere in the world. They are so proud of what they achieve. Plus they have a lot of fun along the way,” says Hunt.



◀ CAMEL DIVE, EGYPT: PROJECTAWARE.ORG/DIVER/CAMEL-DIVE- CLUB-ECO-TRIBE

The Eco Tribe at Camel Dive puts their customers' knowledge to the test with regular pub-style quizzes themed on conservation and the environment as part of their Tuesday Divers' Night.

Earlier this year, they armed customers with a curry and ran a fund-raising quiz night where they collected hundreds of shark petition signatures as part of their Big Shark Shout Out celebrations. The next day, filled with energy and enthusiasm (and food), divers took a Dive Against Debris to clean up habitats where sharks can be found. “Our guests are as keen as we are to conserve our beautiful corner of the Red Sea. They want to get involved and support environmental causes,” says Camel Dive's Marketing Manager Clare Mucklow.

► Want to get in on the action? Visit www.projectaware.org/myocean and create your own eco buzz today.

our little island. It may be just a drop in the ocean, but a dripping tap will eventually fill a glass, and then overflow. Every little bit helps.”

► Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Net Removal Project



One of the monthly hauls of marine debris collected by volunteers and staff from Atlantis Dive Center in Dubai, UAE.

Jason Sockett, Atlantis Dive Center, Dubai, UAE, works with a team of dedicated dive volunteers to Dive Against Debris every month. This is no small commitment. Together, they protect the coastline of Palm Jumeirah from beneath the surface by removing steel cables, truck tires and abandoned fishing gear such as lobster pots and nets.

“What we’re pulling up is fishing nets. When we have a storm, the nets get dragged on to the rocks so what we do is just dive in and then with lift bags we bring them all up. The net we recently removed was about 200 metres/650 feet long. Getting the nets to the surface is the easy part, what’s hardest is trying to drag them onto the boat. Last year, the dive school held six such events but

plans to increase this to one Dive Against Debris a month. It’s a worthy cause, but the majority of people take part because it’s also just a fun day out,” says Sockett.

Not only is Atlantis Dive Center committed to net removal but they’re also creating great underwater videos that help illustrate the intensity of the project, the dedication of the team and the marine debris issue at large.

► Washington, USA, Great Battery Roundup

Laura James is an avid diver and a one-woman show. She loves Puget Sound, Washington, and, disgusted with what she routinely saw beneath the surface, she took it upon herself to start a movement, right in her own back yard — an old marina area where people apparently dump used boat batteries right into the Sound.

Between January and March 2012, James removed 500 kilograms/1100 pounds of lead from the sound. Her battery removal and recycling project generates small funds to continue the work. And she has been expanding a team of dive volunteers to join in her mission while generating a lot of local press as well.

“We can’t make it better overnight. But if we get out on a battery-removal dive once a week, we can slowly make a dent in the pollution caused by these nasty items,” says James. “I’m a bit mortified that I didn’t start doing this years ago. I am as guilty as everyone for just swimming over these batteries. But these batteries, I can take them out. I can do something! The feeling that accompanies doing something physical, something tangible, is a good one.”

The battery-roundup project videos she shoots have been used by government agencies and environmental groups across the country to help show what is happening to our underwater environments.

“As stewards of this water planet, it is up to us to manage the debris that makes it into the ocean. My hope with these videos is to help people fall in love with Puget Sound all over again, and then, as I did so many years ago, come to the vivid realization that we must do everything in our power to protect it.”

🔴 Visit projectaware.org/myocean to join an eco-network of divers taking ocean protection to a whole new level and share your actions.



Your Voice at Work

PADI Professionals continue to build a strong diver community with a purpose. **DAVID ROE, MARINE CONSERVATION OFFICER, PROJECT AWARE FOUNDATION**

This year, dive professionals are playing a major role in gaining protection for threatened sharks by supporting the Project AWARE Sharks in Peril campaign. Here’s how your voice is helping change the ocean:

CITES - Protection from International Trade

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is one of our best options for protecting highly threatened shark species because it controls international trade. But, there is strong resistance from some shark fishing nations due to the economic value of shark fishing.

CITES member nations will meet again to

discuss shark protections in March 2013, but the real work to increase protection for sharks happens now. More than 100,000 advocates signed the Give Sharks a Fighting Chance petition so far, calling on CITES member nations to protect threatened sharks and put an end to the cruel and wasteful practice of shark finning. Your voice, expressed through the shark petition, has already supported Project AWARE staff members as they proposed CITES protection for highly threatened shark species during meetings with United States, European Union and Australian CITES representatives. Further meetings are planned with key CITES member nations in the lead up to the 2013 meeting.

Let’s continue to demonstrate a united, powerful voice for shark protection.

EU Finning Bans - Closing the Loopholes

The European Union (EU) fishing industry is large and influential and improvements in EU shark policies have repercussions in fishing fleets around the world. Loopholes in the existing EU shark finning ban – one of the weakest in the world – allow some finning to continue from European fishing boats.

Project AWARE, with our European partners, is working to close the loopholes. This work paid off in March 2012 when the Council of Fisheries Ministers proposed all EU fishing vessels should land sharks with fins naturally attached. But, the battle is not quite over. The proposal must now pass the European Parliament – so Project AWARE is keeping the pressure on to finally end finning on European fishing vessels.

Marine Parks - Safe Zones for Sharks

The collective voice of divers is crucial when it comes to creating new marine parks and Project AWARE is making sure your voice is heard in the corridors of power on this issue. Many thousands of divers recently supported campaigns for new Australian marine parks, providing a strong counter-argument to those opposing their creation.

An announcement on these new parks is expected in 2012. Thanks to your support, the Australian Government has no doubt that divers support these safe zones for sharks.

Project AWARE is making your call to have sharks protected heard at the highest levels. As dive professionals, you can build support among the dive community for sharks. Start with downloading your Shark Action Kit at www.projectaware.org/project/shark-action-kit and get started today.



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