

NLC and Sea Shepherd collaboration cleans up remote beaches

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A collaboration between the Northern Land Council and Sea Shepherd Australia has seen over 10 tonnes of rubbish cleared from South East Arnhem coastlines in a bid to protect and preserve Country.

Members of the NLC's Yugul Mangi and Numbulwar Numburindi Rangers teamed up with eight Sea Shepherd volunteers to clear rubbish from remote beaches in the South East Arnhem Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) over a two-week period.

With more marine debris washing up on remote NT coastlines than ever before, Traditional Owners and ranger groups are struggling to get on top of the tonnes of waste littering their country.

The debris, which ranges from single use plastic bottles, to shoes, fuel tanks, wooden planks, fishing wire and nets, causes immense damage to sea country and marine wildlife.

Of particular concern are ghost nets, which are not only difficult and time consuming to remove from the beach, but do incredible damage to coastal environments and the wildlife that inhabit the area.

To help tackle this problem, Sea Shepherd Australia is collaborating with Aboriginal ranger groups in remote areas of the Northern Territory and Queensland, providing volunteers from across the country to carry out marine clean ups.

The Numbulwar Numburindi would normally have just six rangers patrolling and caring for 300kms of coastline. The impact of the volunteers helping clear the beach has been invaluable.

Despite the urgency to tackle this worsening problem, Indigenous ranger groups such as the Yugul Mangi and Numbulwar Numburindi Rangers receive minimal funding to carry out these time-consuming and laborious works.

For the past four years, the federally funded \$15 million Ghost Net Initiative has assisted 22 Indigenous ranger groups with clean-up efforts.

This critical funding is set to end, with no certainty it will continue.

Additionally, it was revealed earlier in the year that the Northern Territory Government had cut the \$12 million Aboriginal Ranger Grant program from its budget.

This program provides much needed funds for equipment and infrastructure that ranger groups need to carry out work that protects country and culture.

The NLC hopes to come to an agreement with the NT and Federal Governments around re-establishing this important funding.

QUOTES:

NLC Chair, Matthew Ryan:

“Day in, day out our coastal ranger groups are doing really important work – especially when it comes to ghost net retrieval.

“They are working incredibly hard to keep Country clean and protect song-lines and culture for generations to come.

“They can’t do this work alone, and they have to be funded properly to do it. Everyone loses out if they aren’t.”

Joanne Pomery, Senior Numbulwar Numburindi ranger:

“Seeing this plastic rubbish and nets wash up on my Mothers country hurts my spirit. It doesn’t belong here.

“This sea country and the animals that live in it tells important stories about our culture. But our song lines don’t talk about rubbish. This is not something we want to pass down to our kids and grand-kids.

“It has been fantastic to work with the Sea Shepherd crew, to show people from all over Australia what we are trying to protect.

“What I really want to see is no more plastic. We can keep cleaning but it’s only going to come back. We need to fix this problem at the source.

Grahame Lloyd, Sea Shepherd Marine Debris Coordinator:

“Because of the way the tides move, the tonnes of plastic and discarded fishing nets that gathers in the Gulf of Carpentaria ends up on these really remote coastlines.

“Unfortunately, many Australians don’t understand the extent of the problem or the terrible impact it has on our precious coastal environments and the animals that live in them.

“These clean-ups are about getting as much plastic off the beach as we can but also about our volunteers, who are coming from right across the country, to learn from Aboriginal rangers and really understand the issue they are dealing with every day.”

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