



# Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. REDUCE MARINE PLASTIC POLLUTION

## Position Statement

Adopted January 14, 2015

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**Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. is committed to reducing the plastic waste pollution in our oceans.**

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Since the 1960s our use of plastic has increased exponentially because plastic polymers offer unparalleled design versatility with the added advantage of being relatively easy and inexpensive to manufacture. Lightweight, strong, durable and corrosion resistant, plastic compounds are used in a wide variety of consumer, commercial and industrial products that we rely on every day. 21st century transportation, building and construction, telecommunication, healthcare delivery, exploration and research, consumer goods, packaging, recreation and entertainment would not be possible without plastic. Unfortunately, the durability of plastics and their widespread use is generating a massive waste management concern.

Substantial quantities of discarded plastic now pollute our environment. The full extent of this pervasive problem is unmistakable in our open oceans which are polluted with floating plastic debris (estimated at 46,000 pieces of plastic per square mile) from the poles to the Equator. Gyres (giant circular oceanic surface currents) are particularly polluted. Plastic jetsam can drift for years before it eventually sinks to foul the seabed, washes ashore or converges in the swirling vortexes of the ocean gyres, which are estimated to contain billions of pounds of plastic. The largest of the ocean garbage sites, dubbed the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, is located in the North Pacific Gyre off the coast of California. This floating mass of plastic is twice the size of Texas, with plastic pieces outnumbering sea life six to one. More than just an eyesore, floating plastic debris is a feeding and entanglement hazard for marine animals and seabirds. Hundreds of species mistake floating plastics for food. In a remote island hatchery, thousands of Laysan albatrosses (*Phoebastria immutabilis*) chicks die each year of starvation because their stomachs are filled with the plastics (buttons, golf tees, dishwashing gloves, magic markers, disposable cigarette lighters) fed to them by their parents. Floating plastic bags look like jellyfish to loggerhead sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*) that track prey using their sense of sight rather than smell. Entanglement in plastic debris can lead to injury or death for marine mammals. So many whales have been reported helplessly entangled by derelict fishing gear, that multi-national governmental agencies now train whale disentanglement professionals.

A key focus of scientific concern, floating plastic debris has been found to attract and concentrate persistent organic pollutants such as carcinogenic and endocrine-disrupting polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and organochlorine pesticides (derivatives of DDT) up to a million times their levels in the surrounding seawater. Over 75 percent of the plastic sampled in one study contained these toxins. These contaminated plastics do not biodegrade, but break apart over time into smaller and smaller pieces that further degrade into billions of tiny, even microscopic particles. According to one marine research facility, every water sample collected since 1999 contain these "microplastics". Microplastics hover suspended just below the surface of the water where they are unavoidably swallowed by fish. These toxic particles endanger the fish that ingest them and all life higher up on the food chain, including humans.

Estimates suggest that 80 percent of the plastic adrift in the ocean is runoff from populated coastal areas by way of rivers, tides, rainwater, storm drains, sewage disposal or floods. The remaining 20 percent is dumped from seagoing vessels or off-shore installations. Despite the environmental and potential health impacts, most scientific assessments conclude that it is not feasible to clean up the plastic pollution already everywhere in our oceans. We can, however, reduce the ongoing flow of plastics into the marine environment by responsibly managing plastic production and waste.

Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. recognizes that we must protect life-sustaining marine resources. To prevent more plastic from reaching our oceans and other vital ecosystems, Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. supports the following:

### **To Reduce Marine Plastic Pollution**

- Strictly regulate disposal of plastic waste from both ocean- and land-based sources
- Increase recycling capacity and efficiency to keep pace with the volume of materials collected from recycling receptacles
- Require that producers of plastic take their fair share of responsibility for infrastructure (such as, recycling plants and full capture devices on storm drains) needed to properly recycle materials or prevent them from reaching the marine environment
- Ban the most common and damaging types of plastic debris, such as single-use plastic bags and polystyrene foam food packaging
- Expand marine pollution clean-up programs and invest in emerging technologies to increase the efficiency of cleanup measures
- Promote public awareness of environmental and health impacts associated with plastic pollution, and benefits of recycling plastic waste and reducing consumption of plastics

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**Charter Member of National Garden Clubs, Inc.**

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