

The Sustainable Coastlines Charitable Trust

Pacific plastic pollution: A system for regional grassroots solutions

From the very outset of The Ocean Conference, Secretary-General António Guterres stressed the importance of information, stating, “We cannot improve what we do not measure”. A common thread throughout this conference and in many previous marine litter-focussed meetings is the critical need for strong data to inform and facilitate decision-making.

Marine litter is an issue that is significantly lacking in high-quality information in the Pacific region. SPREP’s Cleaner Pacific 2025 strategy notes, “The extent of the marine litter problem in the Pacific has not been comprehensively documented”. Marine litter is an issue that we can solve. To work towards a plastic-free Pacific, we need a detailed understanding of both the problem and the most effective solutions.

In collaboration with New Zealand government departments and utilising the UNEP / IOC Guidelines on Survey and Monitoring of Marine Litter, The Sustainable Coastlines Charitable Trust is committed to the design, development and rollout of a long-term program for the necessary collection of marine litter and analysis of data associated with it.

Alongside this we will deliver community-engaging and curriculum-aligned education and awareness activities aimed at changing behaviour to stop litter at its source. By evaluating and comparing interventions, we will gain a strong understanding of the most effective litter-reducing solutions so that we can focus on and optimise those that work best.

Critical to this strategy is the ongoing and deep-rooted involvement of youth and citizen scientists -- alongside scientists and technical advisers -- to ensure that we inform and engage communities across the Pacific in real, grassroots, scientifically rigorous actions.

We will commit already-confirmed funding to pilot this program in Aotearoa New Zealand. To leverage the investment and spread the program further, we will adapt, refine and rollout locally specific versions in our branches in Papua New Guinea and Hawaii and -- after proving the concept -- we will work alongside SIDS around the Pacific to deliver impacts on an even larger scale.

Working with leaders from within Pacific communities, the program will focus on enhancing human capacity through in-country and regional training programs. This work will ensure that inspired community members and leaders have open access to the best practice tools we will have developed for reporting on, removing and preventing litter. We will provide ongoing support and training, with a long-term aim of creating employment opportunities around the region for implementing this critical work.

The data collated throughout the program’s clean-up and awareness activities will be freely, openly and publicly available through a purpose-built database equipped with smart communication and visualisation tools. Politicians and the public, students and scientists, writers and researchers alike, will all have digestible information on our plastic problem and the most effective solutions to address it, right at their fingertips.

In other words; we commit to clearing coastlines around the Pacific of harmful litter, delivering increasingly effective interventions to prevent it, and doing so for as long as it takes to solve this challenge. We would love to partner with you to make this happen.