

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA - Bulwer, 4th - 6th March, 2022



Broken up snow-like Polystyrene from a pontoon washed up in floods at Bulwer Wrecks Photo: Doug McEwan

A massive amount of rubbish was washed up on the beaches of Mulgumpin (Moreton Island) from the recent South-East Queensland floods. On Clean Up Australia Day, the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Adrian Schrinner arrived by helicopter at the Bulwer Helipad to witness the disaster. The Courier Mail headline the next day read, ***“ISLAND PARADISE TURNED INTO PLASTIC DISASTER ZONE BY FLOOD FALLOUT”***.

A major problem was Polystyrene from pontoons breaking up. An 8 x 3.5m pontoon dragged for days across the Bulwer Wrecks and littered the beach with so many tiny balls of Polystyrene- it looked like snow.

The pontoon was eventually removed from the water by the Micat Ferry end loader on Sunday. Boats and pontoons, amongst a swathe of other rubbish and debris covered the beaches. Particularly high tides continued to wash up more rubbish - even after the beaches had been cleaned.

The clean up of Bulwer Beach started at the height of the floods the week before. A number of concerned locals picked up tonnes of rubbish by the trailer load. A live cane toad was found washed up on debris, as well as stonefish and even a dead llama.

Moreton Island Protection Committee's (MIPC) event saw members and other volunteers clean up over Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Bulwer Progress and Social Association again assisted with volunteer accommodation and Micat offered discounted fares. Sunday's Clean Up Australia Day had 16 registered volunteers assist the many locals who had already spent four or five days cleaning up the mess. Heavy machinery provided by Micat and Scott Bielenberg helped make the task easier by getting rubbish into waste management bins placed on the beach. The clean up continues well after our event with Sea Shepherd, QYAC and QPWS Rangers and locals still tackling the problem.

An abundance of historical litter such as plastic straws, light sticks used by commercial fishing, small plastic fish- shaped soy sauce containers, plastic toothbrushes, needles and syringes, masses of plastic water and soft drink bottles and lids, thongs, ribbons with balloon remnants, and all forms of micro plastic continue to be collected – all having high detrimental impact on the environment and wildlife.

It was a Clean Up Australia the likes of which none of us ever want to see again. Our society seemingly ignores sustainability. Massive amounts of rubbish and plastic waste severely affect us and our environment. The problem of cheap toxic Polystyrene dependence was obvious in overwhelming proportions. It is certainly time for community changes in attitude – doing nothing risks everything.

Greg Curtis
MIPC

***Polystyrene** (also known as Styrene or EPS Foam) is a synthetic aromatic hydrocarbon polymer and one of the world's biggest health and environmental hazards, despite false marketing from its manufacturers. There are a number of Polystyrene manufacturers in south east Queensland.

- Polystyrene takes up more landfill than any other waste – 30% globally.
- Polystyrene is not only a dangerous air pollutant but also poses a great threat to humans, the environment and wildlife.
- Polystyrene is not biodegradable and takes over 500 years to decompose.
- Polystyrene during decomposition leaches harmful chemicals into the environment.
- Polystyrene as a commercial product has been banned in many cities, states and countries which include California, Seattle, Washington, Portland, Toronto, Paris, Manila and Taiwan.
- Polystyrene contains Styrene which leaches into and contaminates food and drinks served in Polystyrene containers, affecting human health and reproductive systems.
- Polystyrene exposed to sunlight creates harmful air pollutants, contaminates landfill and depletes the ozone layer.
- Polystyrene during manufacture releases large amounts of ozone into the atmosphere, causing respiratory and environmental issues.
- Polystyrene easily breaks apart into small pieces which severely affects marine and wildlife.
- Polystyrene is affected by sunlight in a process called photodegradation - which alters the outer layer of the plastic - discolouring it and turning it into a toxic powdery substance.
- Polystyrene manufacture releases over fifty chemical byproducts which contaminates air and water and affects communities living near the manufacturing facility.
- Polystyrene's released byproduct; Styrene is believed to be a carcinogen.

Exposure to Styrene can cause irritation to the skin, eyes, upper respiratory tract and gastrointestinal tract.

- Styrene overexposure can cause more severe effects such as depression, headaches, fatigue, weakness, hearing loss and disrupted kidney function.
- Styrene at manufacture creates ground-level ozone which can impair lung function, lead to respiratory illness and also impair the nervous system.

**Source: www.ecofriendlyhabits.com*

It's time to ban harmful Polystyrene and use sustainable alternative products currently being developed and in use in locations where Polystyrene has already been banned.

PICTURES FROM THE BULWER CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA EVENT

1.



Please double click on the Bulwer Wrecks icon to the left to view the video.
Click 'Open' and then 'Play' ▶

Polystyrene snow, Bulwer Wrecks. Video: Alanna Boisen

2.



Brisbane Lord Mayor, Adrian Schrinner talking to volunteers cleaning up the beach at Bulwer Photo: Steve Pohlner/Courier Mail

3.



Where do you start? Polystyrene problem – Bulwer Wrecks Photo: Liesbeth Thie

4.



Washed up rubbish and debris littered all Mulgumpin beaches Photo: Alanna Boisen

5.



Washed up needles Photo: Montana Petrie



Washed up mounds of plastic Photo: Liesbeth Thie

6.



Heavy machinery removing washed up boat south of Bulwer Wrecks Photo: Montana Petrie

7.



Live Cane Toad washed up on debris Photo: Alanna Boisen

8.



Assistance by Micat end loader bringing bins onto the beach Photo: Liesbeth Thie

9.



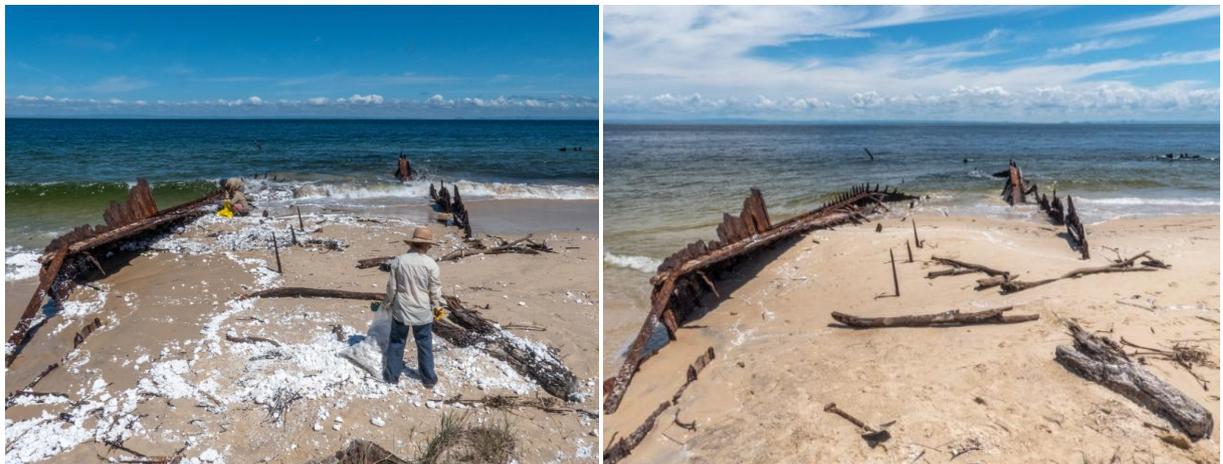
Locals removed tonnes of rubbish by the trailer load for over a week Photo: Liesbeth Thie

10.



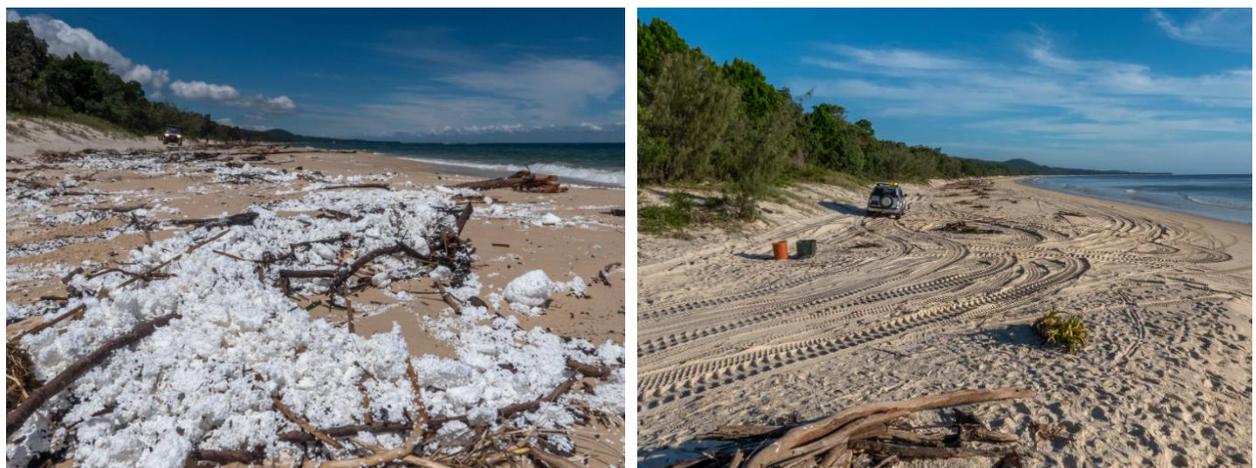
The pontoon – culprit of all the broken up Polystyrene – with accumulated other rubbish Photo: Liesbeth Thie

11.



Bulwer Wrecks - before and after the clean up. Photos: Liesbeth Thie

12.



Beach south of Bulwer Wrecks – before and after the clean up Photos: Liesbeth Thie