

Petition No. 120 – Release of Balloons

2/07/2019

Dear Matthew,

I write in support of my Petition to amend to the Litter Act 1979 (WA) to make the release of balloons an illegal act punishable by an on the spot fine at \$5000 for an individual and \$10,000 for a corporate body

While balloons are associated with commemoration or celebration, there is now conclusive evidence that shows they pose great threat to our land and marine ecosystems. Their use is directly linked to the deaths of marine animals (particularly turtles, but also seabirds and penguins). When helium balloons are released into the atmosphere they have the potential to rise 8km, where atmospheric pressure temperature changes cause the balloons undergo a process called brittle fracture. During this process, the balloon bursts into long strands – strands that to a turtle or bird distinctly resemble a jellyfish. Sea turtles then mistake these fragments as jellyfish and after ingesting the balloon fragments can die from starvation, entanglement or choking. Sea turtles may also ingest partially burst balloons, causing floating syndrome which in turn makes them vulnerable to propeller strikes from boats. The string often attached to balloons has a similarly disastrous affect – winding up wrapped around the beaks of seabirds or entangling and eventually cutting off circulation to their legs. Even so-called ‘biodegradable balloons’ are problematic, because while natural latex may be degradable, but the addition of chemicals and dyes in balloon manufacture mean they still cause damage to the environment, and issues such as the string and shredding still apply.

In further reference to balloons being the focal point of commemoration and celebration: many organisations (including some funeral homes abroad) are working toward encouraging people who are seeking to use mass balloon release to commemorate the loss of a loved one to consider alternatives. These alternatives include planting or gifting seedlings in remembrance; using flags, banners, streamers or reusable bunting; LED candles and more.

This Petition was born of a need for cultural change in WA and the high number of signatures obtained demonstrates the community support for this change. The City of Rockingham’s recently voted to ban single-use plastics and balloons at City events (and on its land and venues), as did The City of Fremantle, whose balloon ban is mere months away, with the council voting to prohibit the release of balloons in the Port city last week. Keep Australia Beautiful WA actively advises against helium balloon release and marine scientists and ecologists have been calling for the ban for years.

The current shift to policies being adopted by Councils in our State points to a clear readiness for change – this petition reflects that change. It is time to ban the deliberate release of balloons for the health of our planet, and for future generations.

We rightly reprimand someone for wilfully littering on the ground – why wouldn’t we do the same for littering in the air (and eventually our waterways).

Please don’t hesitate to contact me, should you require anything else.

Sincerely,

Collette Brennan

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Collette Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C" and a long horizontal flourish at the end.