

Petition No. 120 – Release of Helium Balloons

09/07/2019

Dear Matthew

In 2015 I started to pass a store using latex balloons as a marketing tool to draw the public's attention. The reason I noticed the balloons was because I stopped to pick up some burst particles that were on the ground. I had just purchased a puppy, and this was now my new route to the beach, I soon noticed a pattern in the balloon litter on the ground. I decided I needed to let the store know about the problem, so I sent them a polite e-mail. I didn't get a reply. The litter continued. I started to notice that the balloon litter would gather in the curbs, on the drains and even worse in the drains.

As we were approaching the winter period the council workings had been preparing the drains for the heavy rains, one man told me these storm water drains were emptied across the road into the ocean at South Beach. At this point I knew something more needed to be done. I spoke to The City of Fremantle who then said they would speak with the store owner, but still months went by and nothing changed. I looked at the Western Australia Littering Act of 1979, where it states that balloons are classed as litter when they landed on either water or land. I registered as a litter reporter with Keep Australia Beautiful. I reported the store only to be told by the K.A.B employee that she was aware of the store in question and that it was just a few balloons and not to worry about it.

I work as a wildlife veterinary nurse at Perth Zoo I am constantly being reminded of the effect humans have on our wildlife, especially marine debris. You can only imagine my shock having been told this. This was when I also discovered that the actual release of a balloon or thousands of balloons was not littering. The littering only occurs when they landed. And if nothing was being done about the store that was clearly littering the pavements, curbs, drains and ocean then how would people releasing balloons that then rise up in the air, are blown out to sea, and then pop and land in the ocean ever going to be prosecuted. Even how the littering act is currently written regarding balloon litter it is not serving any purpose.

The Western Australian Littering Act of 1979 needs update. Back in 1979 we were naïve, unaware of the damage that is caused by the release of helium balloons. We believed what the industry told us about them being biodegradable. We know from the numerous reported balloon relating deaths that they are harmful to our wildlife, that they do not break down in water quick enough not to run the risk of ingestion by any marine species that might mistake a balloon as its food source. Studies show that most animals ingesting balloons are them that feed on squid. This means all endangered Sea Turtle. There is no published paper anywhere that shows the rate at which a latex balloon breaks down in saltwater. It is also wrong that the industry can advertise them as being 100% natural latex when this is not true, they do not mention the chemicals added and the heat treatment carried out to make the balloon as tough as possible, therefore taking even longer to biodegrade. In 2015 I founded my campaign Boycott Balloons Fremantle, I named it this because at the time I honestly thought it was something local that I was dealing with. I soon discovered this was a much bigger issue, global in fact. Most people are unaware of the way in which a helium balloons pop. When a helium balloon is released, they have been known to travel up to twenty-eight thousand feet. When this happens, due to the atmospheric temperature they freeze and then pop. Because of the balloon freezing prior to the popping occurring they balloon stays intact at the top and shreds down the sides. This then gives it the likeness of a jellyfish, especially when in water. Due to me starting my awareness campaign which tells the truth about the impact that balloons have on the environment my local balloon retailer formed an

organisation called the Pro Environmental Balloon Alliance. I feel that this organisation was formed because of my success with this issue which now see both Cottesloe and Fremantle with a by-law stopping the release of helium balloons on council land. Many other councils have replied to my e-mails stating that they are in support of my campaign and have made amendments to their policies asking people to not release helium balloons on their land. But they feel this is something the state government should be doing. I agree, as I feel a blanket ban across the state would be much clearer, it can get confusing with different councils having different policies and laws in place. After many years of supplying balloons for helium releases and denying the truth about their environmental impact this organisation no longer supports the release of helium balloons. If this is the message now being given by many people in the industry, I ask myself why the state government has still not made an amendment to the littering act?

As someone who is passionate about the environment, I'm what many would consider a 'greenie'. But throughout this campaign, I have spoken to countless people at market stalls, community groups and on street, and that, coupled with my many media engagements have demonstrated to me how this issue has cut through to the general population. On ABC720 the callers/texters were unanimously supportive of the ban, and I've been inundated with support from people from all walks of life. Crucially, in my role at Story Dogs, I speak to schoolchildren frequently, and they're the ones who *really* understand this issue. If children can happily give up balloons for the sake of our planet, so can adults. Western Australia is ready for this and ready to support this ban. There is a global movement and recognition of the damage balloons do to our marine and animal life and environment. The time is now. I would like to remind you of Mark McGowan's opening speech in Parliament where he stated the following, Environmental and industry are two areas of Labors natural strengths in which it needs to assert its superiority over those opposing it. He said if members of his party were to walk into a classroom and ask the students what they thought was the major issue of this age, they would say "The Environment". Therefore, it must be Labors goal to ensure that clean air, clean water, the prevention of soil erosion and the protection of endangered species continues to be part of its focus.

I implore you to make this change, for the sake of WA and the planet. For the children who will inherit this land – I want to leave a lasting legacy. A cleaner, greener future is for the betterment of us all. It's time to ban balloons.

Below I have attached some links that may assist in your decision making

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-36585-9>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-30038-z>

https://www.acap.aq/en/news/latest-news/2696-the-last-straw-two-southern-ocean-albatrosses-die-after-ingesting-balloons-in-australia?highlight=WyJzdHJhdyJd&fbclid=IwAR2Lf2KbTy-25z-qxJ5Kuv6lgWTy3Em4_Z6gpmiXp-llvi4o3vLy501dF0