

G'day,

I am writing to you regarding the recent article in The Sunday Mail (1 August 10) regarding the Qld Government looking at the issue of banning helium balloon releases as part of the "Waste Strategy Review".

I have attached an article "What Goes Up" and photos which give a voice to the voiceless and are clear proof the potential harm helium balloons if released can cause.

The article and photo's are by the late Lance Ferris of Australian Seabird Rescue, based in Ballina. This wildlife rescue organisation is now managed by Lance's daughter Rochelle Ferris, her partner Keith and Marny Bonner (woman on right of photo on front of the article).

In the article Lance's offers a factual argument and scientific study which contradicts those stated by the Balloon Artists & Suppliers Association of Australia and the study which they base their reasoning which was conducted in 1989, by a technical Advisor employed by the balloon industry. In the article Lance is not opposed to helium balloons, just their release, with the reasoning supported by hard fact, basic scientific analysis and photos.

The second attachment is a photo of three balloons found on the shoreline which have commenced to break down (These are three of hundreds if not thousands I have collected whilst walking along beaches and the shoreline over the years). The common way for this to occur in marine environments appears to be threading from the outside edges in, giving the appearance of a marine creature such as a jelly fish (Just ask a class of year 3's and they will give you an honest answer).

Banning the release of helium balloons is a step in the right direction, however not the complete answer. The fact is despite the act being illegal in NSW since 2000, time and again we see balloons released at funerals, with little thought or regard to potential ramifications for wildlife. This problem appears to be growing exponentially, many of the recent deaths covered by the media where balloons have been released have gained national media coverage including; a Mullumbimby School boy bashed to death at school; another stabbed to death in Shorncliffe; a young child taken from her home and murdered in Bundaberg; a young lifesaver drowning at the National Championships on the Gold Coast and a woman brutally murdered and her body dumped in a tip on the Sunshine Coast. Yes these deaths are all tragic, yet it is very unfortunate that from one death mourned, many others may result. As this act often occurs during times of extreme human emotion, few persons have the will or courage to stand against it, with the few that do termed 'heartless'. Not too mention the likelihood of a government agency taking action under such circumstances, it would be political suicide.

As a coastal ecologist, wildlife carer and rescuer, that witnesses time and again the direct result of such thoughtless action, I feel it is critical that people become aware and are given a far greater and meaningful alternative. One which will open their minds, hearts and souls, giving and supporting life rather than potentially destroying it.

The alternative is none other than the simple act of planting a native tree or native trees, creating a living, breathing monument of

a life lived, one which supports life on every ecological scale from soil micro-biology and the insect world to avian and macro fauna. Providing these creatures with homes and food; preventing runoff into waterways by stabilising the soil; not too mention providing oxygen, helping reduce global warming and even shade to humans on a hot day. A living monument which can be watched as it evolves, visited, embraced and loved until even those which mourned a loved one loss, pass from this world, leaving a legacy to the generations of many species, not just our own.

One final note, is the fact that it makes no difference if helium balloons are released near waterways or hundreds of kilometers inland. These balloons are known to travel hundreds of kilometers as highlighted by FACT in Lance's article and even supported by an article which appeared in the Courier Mail (2009) concerning residents of a small country Qld town demonstrating their concerns of the travel distance of toxic mine dust, by releasing yellow balloons into the sky and seeing how far they travelled. It was reported by the Courier Mail that some these balloons travelled over 300km East to towns in the Sunshine Coast.

Awareness and education is the key, (prevention rather than prosecution) there is only one way to reach the masses and it is through the media. I am happy to discuss this issue further. Other persons which I believe would be interested in commenting on this issue and provide clear evidence as to the threat of balloons to wildlife is Marny Bonner and Rochelle Ferris of Australian Seabird Rescue, Ballina on 02 66862852 or visit www.seabirdrescue.org and Dr Kathy Townsend of the University of Queensland Manager Moreton Bay Research Station 07 34099058 or visit <http://www.marine.uq.edu.au/about-mbrs>.

Regards,

Anthony Muyt



WHAT GOES UP, DOES COME DOWN

3 June 2006.

Party balloons are a child's delight, especially if the balloon is filled with helium, and floats magically in the air.

Although the mass releases of helium balloons are illegal in NSW, the occasional party balloon slips through the fingers and drifts off to places unknown. We regularly pick balloons, scattered along the beaches, to avoid them being swallowed by turtles and seabirds.

On Tuesday, June Harris, a local, avid birder noticed a Giant Petrel wallowing helplessly in the surf at Shelley Beach. ASR Volunteers Rod and Angie were soon on the scene and retrieved the bird from the water. A ribbon was hanging from the bird's beak and we had some serious fears that a balloon was lodged in its intestines.

For an hour we struggled with the ribbon, but try as we may, the item would not dislodge. In desperation, we dosed the bird with olive oil, to lubricate the system. A few minutes later, 30 cm of ribbon was hauled from the bird's innards, with an orange balloon attached. The bird was starving, and would have died in a matter of days. Within the hour of removing the balloon, the bird was feasting on fresh fish at our WildlifeLink Centre.

The New South Wales government has banned mass releases of helium balloons.

Whilst these releases continue in many parts of the world, considerable information from overseas sources continues to support the fact that marine creatures are at risk from swallowing these balloons.

Whether the balloon is attached to a string or not, if it is filled with helium, it will float, and eventually come down still presenting a choking hazard or digestion hazard for marine turtles and many other species.

Recently, a Northern Giant Petrel, (a very large pelagic seabird), now listed as an endangered species, was presented with a ribbon hanging from its beak. The big bird was near death. Suspecting the ribbon was attached to a balloon, volunteers were initially unsuccessful in removing the balloon, when the ribbon broke.

However, after rejoining the ribbon, and tubing some paraffin oil into the bird, the orange balloon was removed from the intestines of the bird. Within several minutes of the operation, the bird consumed almost one kilogram of fish, and was eventually released. Contrary to some beliefs, wildlife rescuers and rehabilitators, such as Australian Seabird Rescue achieve an extremely high success rate in the successful release of over 70 species of seabirds, and five species of marine turtles.

As an experiment, the deflated balloon was towed around the bird's pool, to determine the bird's reaction. The Petrel was intent on chasing the balloon and volunteers had to be intensely alert, in order that the bird did not swallow the balloon, again.

It has been said, that helium-filled balloons rise to a height where they 'freeze to a state of brittle fracture' and 'burst into small pieces, whereupon the flutter harmlessly to earth'.

We placed several **latex balloons**, from various manufacturers, into a commercial freezer, which was operating at **50 degs Celsius BELOW ZERO**. **Despite two months in this sub-zero environment, the balloons retained their shape, albeit partially deflated**. After the period of two months, volunteers entered the freezer, and waited until the temperature had returned to 50 degs below zero. **Even at that temperature, the balloons were still pliable and had not reached a state of 'brittle fracture'**.



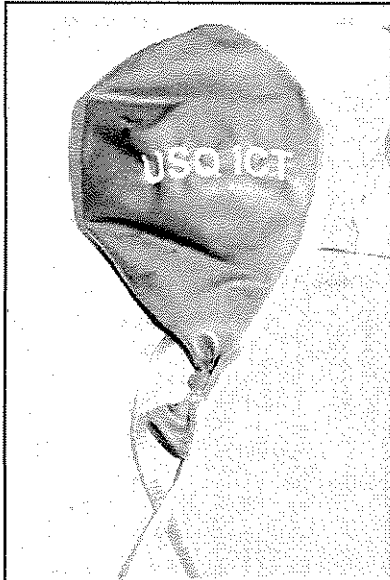
On 15 August 2007, several balloons were found tied together on South Ballina beach, New South Wales, Australia. One of the balloons originated from Mingara Recreation Club on the Central Coast of New South Wales, 660km south of Ballina. After informing Mingara of the find, the Club explained helium balloons are used internally for promotional activities, however balloons are given to members for their children if requested.

Previously unaware of the impacts of helium balloons, the Club is now implementing a safe use policy for balloons and educating their staff on the impact of helium balloons on

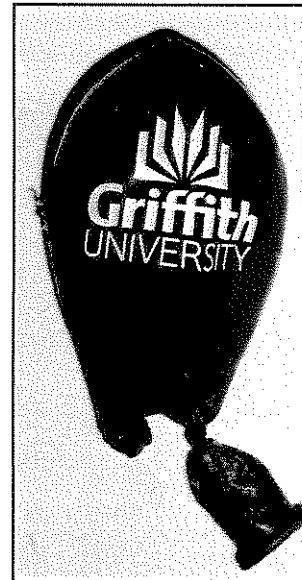
the environment. Whilst these few balloons were accidentally released, it demonstrated the distance some of these balloons can travel.

The balloons had not only travelled 660 kilometres, **but they had not 'fractured into small harmless pieces'** (as suggested by the balloon companies).

Ironically, even if balloons *did* fracture into small pieces, according to our studies and autopsies of marine turtles, **each piece of balloon would present a significant threat to small, hatchling turtles**. All species of seaturtles in Australian waters are considered endangered, threatened or vulnerable. According to Dr Colin Limpus of the Environmental Protection Agency of Queensland, the statistics indicate that only **1-in-1000 seaturtles survives to maturity!**



The balloon (left) travelled 400 kilometres from The University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, to Angourie, New South Wales. Whilst it did have a string attached, it was completely intact, showing that these balloons can travel long distances, and not burst into fragments.



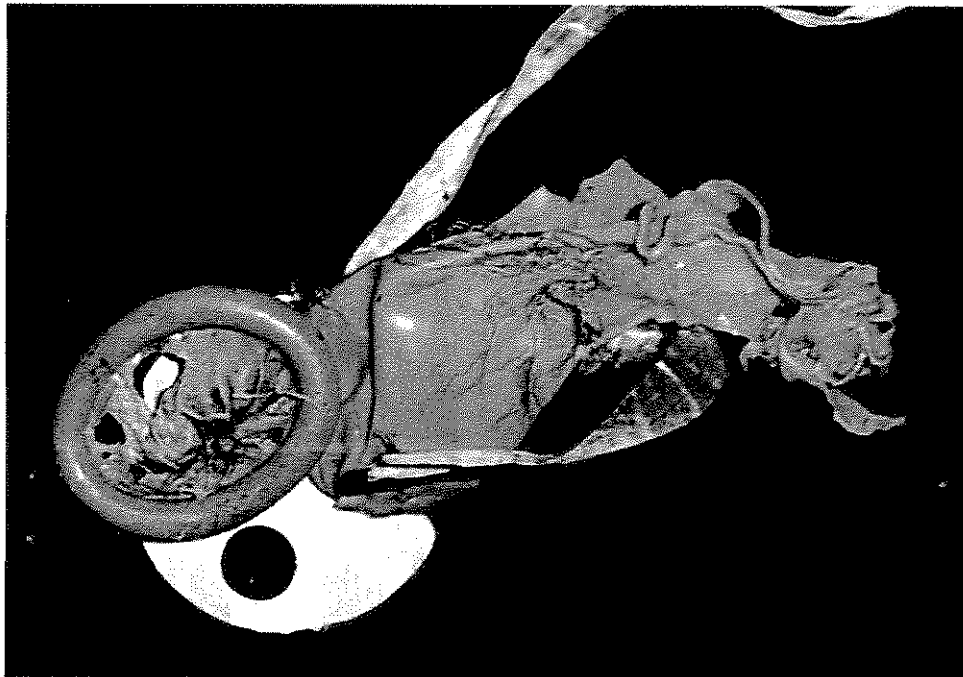
Another balloon (right) travelled 200 kilometres from Brisbane to a beach at Lennox Head on the North Coast of New South Wales.

Neither of these balloons fragmented into small pieces, and in fact the 'USQ' balloon was fully intact and still contained some air.

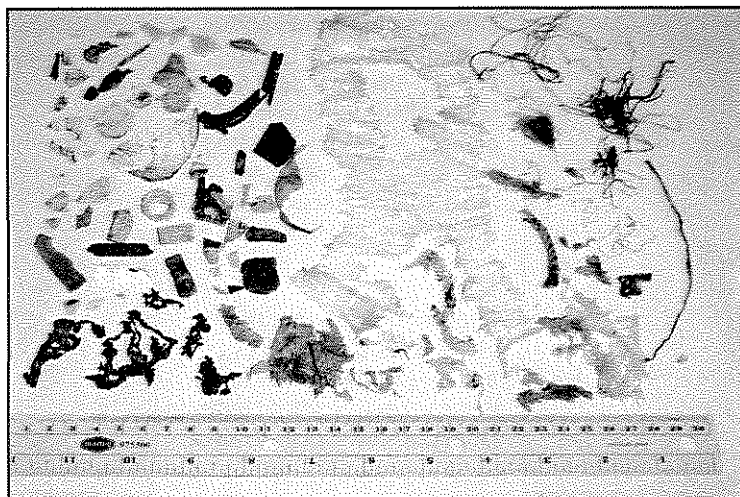
Agreed, latex is biodegradable. However, there are many marine creatures constantly searching for food sources. A floating balloon, or a piece thereof, represents a food source, whether it is biodegradable, deflated, blue, green, orange, or in small, so-called 'harmless' pieces... and continues to be a significant threat to our precious wildlife, irrespective of the size, colour, texture or shape of the pollutant.

Below, is the balloon which was removed from the Giant Petrel in May 2006.

10 MONTHS LATER. (Image dated 25 March 2007).



Below is an example of the host of different types of pollutants, (107 items), ingested by ONE 38 cm Green sea turtle.



In worldwide studies, (U.S. Fisheries and Wildlife, UK Marine Conservation Society) it is estimated that a latex balloon may take as long as 12 months to biodegrade. Meanwhile, as they degrade, thousands more are released into the environment at balloon releases... to 'top up' the constant threat to our wildlife.

In early 2007, Kathy Townsend PhD, of Queensland University, found balloons in the stomach of a dead sea turtle.

Dumping of balloons into the environment, whether it is on the ground or in the air, is not only littering, but presents a hazard to marine creatures who mistake these items for food.

The 'jet-stream' air-flow across the continent is from west to east. Helium balloons are thus likely to reach the height of the jet-stream, and eventually find their way into the ocean.

Have you ever been to a party where helium balloons were floating around the room? And for those who stayed late, they would have noticed that these balloons slowly drifted to the floor.



Left: Debris removed from the intestines of a dead 40 cm Green sea turtle.

There is a simple explanation; Helium is an expensive gas. Its atomic structure is very small, in fact the second smallest atom in the world. A balloon is filled with what is called 'balloon gas' – a mixture of ordinary air and helium – just enough to float the balloon. The Helium is small enough, over a time, to pass through the wall of the balloon, thus allowing the balloon to descend.

If one was to dump 1000 balloons on the roadway, the action would incur a penalty for littering. What gives us the right to dump many thousands of balloons in the ocean? That is very likely where helium filled balloons will end up.



A necropsy of a dead, 25 cm Green Seaturtle at Ballina NSW on the 25 August 2007, indicated that a balloon fragment had blocked the 'pylorus' (the bottom of the stomach), preventing the passage of food from the stomach into the intestines.

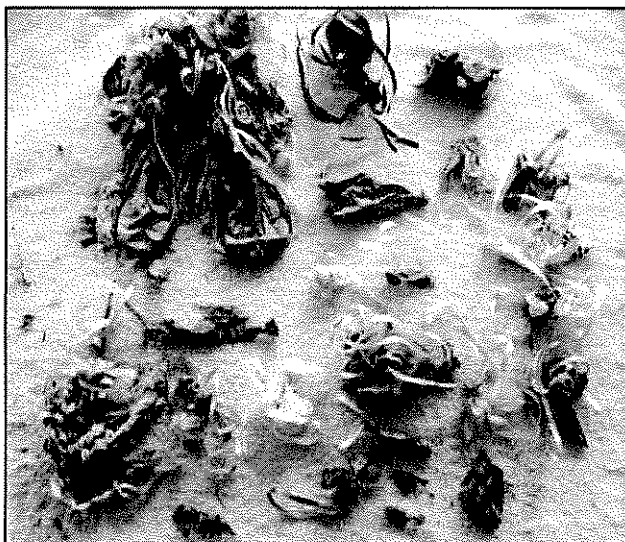
NOTE the absence of any food matter in the intestines, below the stomach.

EVERY PERSON involved in the release of helium balloons **creates a real threat** to many endangered species of marine creatures.

Whether it goes up, or down, it is litter, and can contribute to the deaths of marine creatures.

At the closing ceremony of the Paralympics (2000), thousands of balloons were used in the display. Not one was filled with helium, and not one ended up in the ocean. **There are many ways to celebrate with balloons, without recklessly endangering our wildlife.**

Ask the children this: "Would you like a balloon to take home... or would you rather we just throw them away into the ocean?"



A sample of 40 balloons collected in one hour, on one kilometre of beach.

Angourie, New South Wales.
26 August 2007.

What goes up, DOES come down!

Up... or down... litter is litter.

We are losing our endangered species.