

WHEN DOES BEACHCOMBING BECOME A CHORE?

BY WILL SCARLET

Beachcombing has become an interest since I have been spending so much time tending traps and bait stations on the coast. It's a natural really. You need to keep your head down and eyes on the terrain as it's mostly rock hopping. Choice finds are few and far between.

A great all-weather bean bag seat and two quality fenders are welcome additions to the trust's boat, and a pair of expensive binoculars proved not to be waterproof as written on the casing. But it gave me a fascinating time pulling it apart and gluing the best bits back together for a reasonable monocular.

Driftwood is often a treasure that makes my eyes wander and a few worn and sea-bleached pieces of artworks carved by nature lie around my garden and deck.

The most noticeable flotsam though is the rubbish, especially in the bays where wind and tide have pushed it all up to settle in a mess of seaweed and driftwood, along with clothes pegs, tennis balls, plastic bottles, odd shoes, jandals, cigarette lighters and glass.

Three summers ago I picked up bottles of a brand of beer new on the market, Steinlager Pure. When you find more than a few you wonder if they're all falling off the boat or being purposely ditched.

I've heard a discussion about bottles being okay in the sea as they are mostly made of sand and wear down, but many don't. When a storm comes into these shallow areas where boaties anchor, a sea swell off the bottom brings the bottles back up, many of them breaking in the process.

I haven't missed out the hundreds of plastic articles on the tidal edge. The most numerous by far are amateur fisher bait bags of all sizes and descriptions, on every beach, caught in the seaweed and lower branches of trees. Broken, bleached pieces are also scattered in vegetation way above the shore.

Many years ago, when the first beach cleanups took place (Auckland University's Geography Department had something to do with it), identifying where rubbish came from and tracing it to the producer was part of the project.

Those early cleanups identified blue plastic strapping as used in the commercial fishing industry as a problem. To the industry's credit, they changed the way they packaged their bait as soon as they were made aware of the extent of the problem.

But who is responsible for the amateur bait bag problem, the users or the producers? If we want to solve the problem I think we need to set our sights on the producers of plastics.

Didn't agenda 21 at the Rio conference on pollution 20-odd years ago make the decision, "producers pay"? As with the



Marine farmers say they collect and bag the mussel ropes for reuse. The evidence suggests otherwise.



Will Scarlet from Kaikoura Island with a small beachcombing result of mussel lines ties that have been cut away during harvesting

plastic strapping problem, maybe it's time to find a new way of packaging fishers' products and get plastic bags off boats completely.

Amateur fishing has become a huge industry. Did you know we consume so much bait we have to import it from

other countries? Is that a sad indictment on the state of the industry? Fishing magazines have become cover-to-cover advertisements for conspicuous consumption. Even the articles are advertisements. Just look at the thousands of boats around the Hauraki Gulf. Rocket launchers and rods bristle like porcupines and all the products and toys come in plastic bags.

Hooks, sinkers, plastic baits, frozen baits, berley bombs, poppers, flashers, jogs and lures – you name it and you'll find it washed up on the foreshore. It's time amateur fishers and those who make these products cleaned up their act.

They are even making baits out of plastic now, while feeding the fisher a million-dollar advertising campaign to buy it.

Another new coastal pollutant is the hundreds of bright green polyester rope pieces and knots from the mussel farm industry. These are used to tie the mussel rope to the backbone. I have now collected over two sacks full that have washed all around the island to land on every beach. I have taken this problem up directly with the Coromandel mussel barge workers and expect them to stop washing it over the side.

Port Fitzroy Harbour on Great Barrier Island is breathing the sea in and out like a big, living lung. It's dynamic. Our most common wind is the sou'wester, which brings a lot of flotsam from the Hauraki Gulf and drops it on our western shores. Tides and currents suck it into the harbour, clogging up nature's lungs over time.

We have to do better.

www.motukaikoura.org.nz

