

Position Statement on balloons - what goes up must come down

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Boomerang Alliance opposes any release of helium and other lighter-than-air balloons (except for essential scientific purposes)

Sadly, many in our community do not realise the dire consequences of releasing helium-filled balloons and their impacts on native wildlife. The fact is that these balloons fracture and burst in the atmosphere and their remnants and any associated strings and ribbons fall back to earth or into coastal waters. These fragments resemble food to wildlife and are often eaten or cause entanglement.

The impact of balloons on litter, marine and terrestrial wildlife and farm animals is well recognised and documented in the scientific and marine pollution prevention communities.¹



Left: Entangled Albatross washed up on Dolphin Point Beach, NSW, Christmas Day 2020

Right: Eid Festival balloons released in Liverpool NSW, arrived at Lord Howe Island 10 days later, in 2017.

Photo credit: Marine Park Rangers from the Lord Howe Island Marine Park who submitted data to the Australian Marine Debris Initiative Database

In all States and Territories, the deliberate release of helium balloons is an act of littering under State or Territory law. Unfortunately, this has not put a stop to this dangerous activity as it is rarely enforced and is therefore an ineffective way to stop balloon releases. Authorities still turn a blind eye to balloon releases at commercial and public events and commemorations.

While ever helium balloon packages are easily available to the public, any enforcement is, and will be, problematic.

Boomerang Alliance (representing our 53 allied organisations) supports:

- a ban on any release of balloons - every State and Territory to introduce specific laws or amendments to existing laws to clearly ban any release of helium balloons (of any number)
- a ban on the sale of helium to the public to inflate balloons, with helium only available from businesses registered as balloon industry suppliers who can control the chain of custody, prevent releases and arrange correct disposal (a national register of suppliers to be established or helium suppliers to provide only to registered industry suppliers)
- Every State and Territory to advise all relevant agencies, local government and event/hospitality sectors about the ban and provide adequate policing to monitor and impose financial penalties to ensure compliance.

¹ <https://www.acap.aq/news/latest-news/2696-the-last-straw-two-southern-ocean-albatrosses-%20dieafter-ingesting-balloons-in-australia>
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X15002985>
<https://phys.org/news/2019-03-balloons-marine-debris-mortality-seabirds.html?>

The balloon industry professionals would also be legally responsible for the correct balloon disposal (e.g., 'Pin It and Bin It') and educating their customers that releasing balloons is an offence and of the importance of disposing of balloons responsibly.

The Pro Environment Balloon Alliance, representing the Australian balloon industry, is asking for national legislation to ban the deliberate release of balloons.²

Additional data

According to the National Litter Index, balloons make up 0.07% of litter. However, the impact of balloons can be much greater than this low percentage would indicate. An animal will not try to eat a can or drink bottle but will mistake a burst balloon for food. This then has the potential to cause digestive blockage and starvation. Released balloons invariably have clips, which also cause choking and blockages, and streamers/ribbons/strings attached which cause entanglement, preventing wildlife from free movement and feeding. Dr. Jenn Lavers, Research fellow at the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies, says she finds balloons "in about one in 20 of every sea bird she examines" [SMH article 19/5/2015 (Ban Balloons to Save birds, say Scientists)].

Tangaroa Blue's Australian Marine Debris Initiative Database gives an indication of numbers of balloons found in marine debris collections and is arguably the tip of the iceberg. Nationwide, 22,504 balloons (whole, burst and remnant) were collected from select beaches 2013-2016 (8).

Most helium-filled balloons are not biodegradable, and even the ones that claim to be, degrade very slowly, and are often eaten by animals, reptiles or birds or become entangled with wildlife.

Balloons Australia 2017		All sites but with adjustment for Hawkesbury River and Brisbane						
State	Item	Item Class Total	Balloon % of item class	Estimated # balloons	Add in revised Hawkesbury BW figure	Estimated # balloons adjusted	# clean-ups	Average balloons per clean-up
NSW	Rubber balloons, balls & toys	6,992	82%	5,713	2,138	7,851	772	7
NT		362	73%	265		265	62	4
QLD		9,753	69%	6,728		6,728	1,123	6
SA		224	96%	216		216	106	2
TAS		394	81%	318		318	90	4
VIC		1,923	77%	1,481		1,481	205	7
WA		5,809	80%	4,624		4,624	1,436	3
	Totals	25,457	80%	20,366	2,138	22,504	3,794	5

Many State governments and other organisations offer education about the alternatives:

- NSW EPA: <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/litter-and-illegal-dumping/epa-work-prevent-litter/balloon-litter>
- ZOOS VICTORIA: <https://www.zoo.org.au/balloons/>
- FUNERAL CELEBRANTS AUSTRALIA: <https://www.funeralcelebrants.org.au/funeral-industry-trends/balloon-releases-at-funerals>
- SUSTAINABILITY VICTORIA: <https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/balloons>
- QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT: <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/pollution/management/waste/litter-illegal-dumping/balloons>

Credit: Thank you to [No Balloon Release Australia](#) and [Tangaroa Blue](#) for their assistance with this Position Paper.

² <https://www.peba.com.au/>