

THE CASE OF PLASTICS & MICROPLASTICS

Plastics consistently make up 60 to 80% of all marine litter items.

For most plastic products, their mechanical integrity and durability is their most important property. However, this property turns to a disadvantage once plastics become waste, as they do not break down easily! It is estimated that it takes hundreds of years for plastics to fully degrade in the sea.

Plastic items gradually fragment into ever-smaller pieces called microplastics (with a diameter smaller than 5mm). Microplastics do enter the sea directly as well, via:

- cleaning and personal care products (e.g. abrasives)
- washed clothes (e.g. polyester microfibers) or
- small resin pellets that are the industrial raw material of plastic products.

This floating “plastic dust” is ingested by a wide range of organisms. Invisible to the naked eye, microplastics mingle with plankton and simply cannot be scooped out of the oceans...