



Media Release

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600+ cigarette butts collected at North Coogee carpark prompts quirky bin to increase microplastic pollution awareness

Ever wanted to vote with your butt and help put an end to plastic pollution? Well, now you can, at the Port Coogee Village Shopping Centre carpark.

The North Coogee carpark is a hot spot for cigarette butt litter and a new purpose-built ballot box bin encourages their responsible disposal. Smokers use their cigarette ends to 'vote' for one of two answers to a fun, thought-provoking question on the bin – the current question is “If you dig a hole in the South Pole are you digging up or down?”

The City of Cockburn is supporting Cockburn-based sustainable swimwear designer Ocean Remedy which received a \$3,802 Keep Australia Beautiful WA (KABCWA) Community Litter Grant to install the bin, one of two believed to be the first of their kind in WA.

With similar models a common sight in Europe, Ocean Remedy director Claire O’Loughlin will monitor and empty the bin and another in Melville, on a regular basis and send the butts to TerraCycle for recycling. City of Cockburn staff already use TerraCycle to recycle old stationery, bread tags and toothpaste tubes.

Ocean Remedy, which creates swimwear from a regenerated nylon fibre called Econyl, will also use the KABCWA grant to input data from the bins’ collections to inform AUSMAP (Australian Microplastic Assessment Project) which trains citizen scientists to collect valuable data on microplastics utilising a standardised methodology.

The cigarette butt data will be added to the Australian Marine Debris Initiative database.

Ms O’Loughlin said the project would increase the knowledge and capacity of communities to ‘take charge’ of the plastic litter problem and magnify community awareness of the issue.

“This project provides vital data on the issue of microplastic pollution that is comparable with locations nationally. The data will be open access using the AUSMAP Hotspot



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Interactive Map,” Ms O’Loughlin said.

City of Cockburn Waste Education Coordinator Clare Courtauld said the project was an adventurous, informal way to provide community education on how to reduce litter, especially microplastics.

“Cigarette butts are made from non-biodegradable plastic and can take 12-15 years to break down,” Ms Courtauld said.

“Ms O’Loughlin collected 600 cigarette butts at the shopping centre carpark in recent weeks and KABC data tells us that cigarette butts are the most littered item in Australia. In WA, they comprise around 30 per cent of the litter stream.

“About seven billion of the 24 billion filtered cigarettes sold every year in Australia end up as litter and they often end up in waterways where they leach toxic chemicals and are mistaken as food by marine life.”

Port Coogee Community Association is also helping keep the shopping centre carpark area clean, with regular litter patrols by dedicated local volunteers.

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