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NEWS

Armed with a vacuum to clean up an environmental nightmare

Luke Mortimer | 11th Oct 2016 12:10 PM Updated: 12th Oct 2016 5:43 AM

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Paula Creen spent her weekend cleaning up styrofoam beanbag balls scattered along a Slade Point beach.

Luke Mortimer

scattered along a windy stretch of beach.

Slade Point resident Paula Creen spent her weekend vacuuming and scooping up the styrofoam (polystyrene) after she found two beanbags on the beach last Tuesday and Thursday.

One of the bags had its zipper open, spilling the balls far and wide, with the worst of the mess found along a rock wall and small beach, close to mangroves, at the end of Slade Point Rd.

Ms Creen and a group of about four other volunteers have grabbed vacuum cleaners, dustpans and other household items and dug in for the long haul.

Lance Payne has been cleaning beanbag balls from a Slade Point beach. You might have guessed, due to the balls strewn through his beard.

Luke Mortimer

"I walk the dogs down here regularly and on Tuesday morning I found a beanbag by the beach," Ms Creen said.

"On Thursday morning I found another one, but this time it had the zip open and most of the beans had spilled out of it.

"It was thick with styrofoam. The beach was just dense with the stuff. I've probably filled the vacuum about four times and I only started with the vaccuum on Saturday afternoon.

"I let the council know on Monday and they did come down yesterday, but they only walked along the top of the beach and said they didn't see anything."

Thankfully, Ms Creen said the council returned this morning to help with the clean up.

"They were down here again, actually on the beach, and they've said they'd be back with a vaccuum cleaner. That took about four hours," she said.

"My concern in that the tide will wash the balls into the rocks and then they'll be filtering out for years.

"Anything that lives on lizard eggs amongst the rocks - birds, fish turtles - could swallow them."

Mackay Regional Council staff were spotted on the beach this afternoon, using a vacuum machine, not visually dissimilar to Ms Creen's household machine, to remove the worst of the debris.

But the clean up is far from done, judging by the styrofoam beads still littering the beach.

Mackay Regional Council staff starting helping with the styrofoam clean up today.

Luke Mortimer

Ms Creen believes the beanbags were probably dumped by someone who simply didn't care about the environmental impact.

She urged Slade Point residents to head down to the beach, located across the road from Slade Point Skate Park, to pitch in and help clean up the environmental mess.

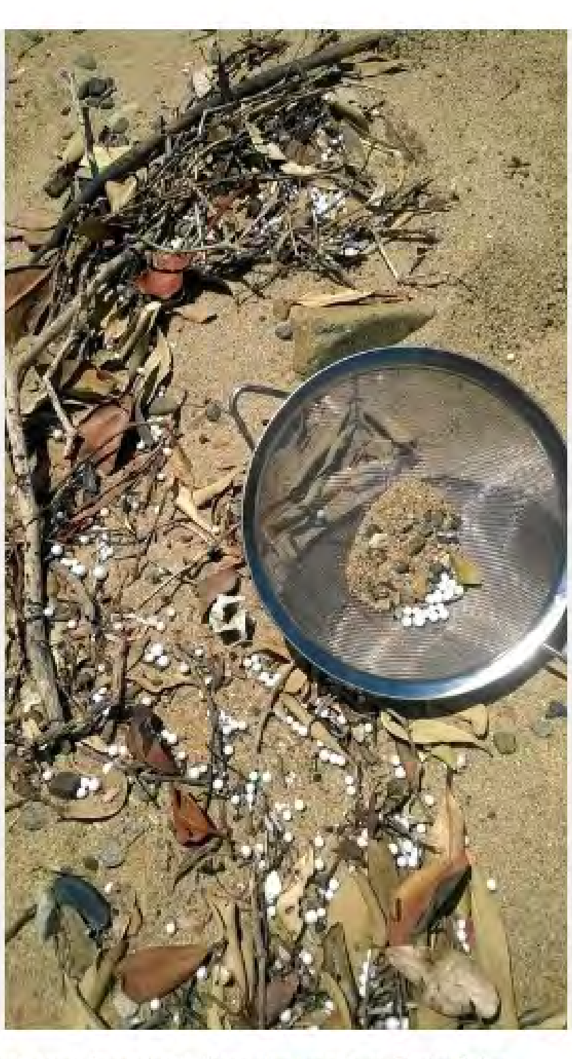
Sea birds are known to eat polystyrene balls, confusing them with fish eggs and crustaceans.

The foam breaks up into pieces which can choke animals and clog their digestive systems.

Polystyrene is a petroleum-based plastic used in a wide range of consumer products and environmental agencies believe most styrofoam in landfills will still be around in 500 years.

INITIAL: SLADE Point residents have resorted to using a vacuum cleaner to clear a beach littered with thousands of styrofoam beanbag balls.

The worst of the mess is around a rock wall and small beach, close to mangroves, at the end of Slade Point Rd.



Thousands of small styrofoam balls litter the beach at Slade Point

Volunteer Lance Payne, a temporary resident in Mackay, said the lack of response from authorities to the environmental nightmare was a "disgrace".

"We have had one woman here for two days trying to clean it up with a vacuum," he said. "She has taken the day off work to clean it up."

"We have about four volunteers here right now. We couldn't get the equipment to clean it up."

Mackay Regional Council has responded and plans to send equipment to the site today.

TOPICS: BEACH, CLEAN-UP, ENVIRONMENT, MACKAY REGIONAL COUNCIL, SLADE POINT, STYROFOAM

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