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FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN WITH LOVE

By Daniele De Winter

One of the many great things about living in Monaco in addition to the sun, sea, scrumptious Mediterranean cuisine, super tax regime and seemingly endless parties is that the entire Principality, starting with His Serene Highness Prince Albert of Monaco, is splendidly passionate about protecting our oceans.

Having just concluded a 4th year as official "Yachting Health and Beauty Partner" of the iconic Monaco Yacht Show it feels timely to bring together some key insights from marine specialists about the state of our oceans today.

Although blue and serene from a distance, our oceans are fast becoming a toxic soup of mercury, lead and megatons of plastic. Annual plastic production has increased twentyfold since 1964, 50% of which is used JUST ONCE – for example, the average 'working life' of a plastic bag is literally only 15 minutes.

The process of producing bottled water requires around 6x more water than the final bottle holds, ie 6L of precious water is used for the production of each 1L plastic bottle.

The average American uses and disposes of over 320 plastic water bottles every year, leading to over 100 billion plastic water bottles thrown away in the USA alone, many of which end up in the sea.

Over 8 Million tons of plastic are dumped in our oceans every year – and this amount is expected to double by 2020 and reach a staggering 32 million tons p/a by 2050, at which time it is estimated there will be more plastic in our oceans than fish.

Today, every creature in our oceans is exposed to plastic: from tiny plankton to giant whales, and the stomachs of dead whales are regularly found to contain a huge assortment of plastic bags, plastic bottles, plastic bits, fishing nets and all sorts of other synthetic junk, clogging up the whales digestive systems and slowly suffocating them from the inside.

Plastics in our oceans are also interfering with whale & dolphin's ability to reproduce: New whale mothers draw on their deep fat reserves for the first time to make rich milk for their calves. Because those fat reserves have not been tapped before, ultra-high levels of toxins caused by ingesting heavy metals and plastic have been allowed to build up in the fat, which could help to explain why one

pod of killer whales off the Scottish coast have not been able to raise a single live calf in the past 25 years.

It is not just that plastic itself is harmful. Worse still is its tendency to attract other toxins in the water, almost like a magnet. Poisons cling to it, and when the plastic is swallowed, scientists fear those toxins could be released into the gut of the animal. Certainly, some whales and dolphins are among the most contaminated creatures on the planet.

According to The Animal Fund (www.theanimalfund.net), 7 out of our 13 whale species are today classified as endangered. Whales have been in our oceans for over 30 Million years and in addition to being majestic creatures of the deep, are actually essential for life on earth as we know it:

- whale poop nourishes the algae that produce over 50% of the oxygen in our atmosphere,
- whale faeces also stimulate the growth of phytoplankton which clears carbon from the air, creating a cleaner atmosphere and making our environment fresher and healthier.

Without whales in our oceans, our atmosphere could literally become depleted in oxygen and existing pollution levels and global warming could become much worse. To quote a report published by the BBC in September 2015:

The number of living creatures in our oceans has halved since 1970 (in just 45 years). "Human activity has severely damaged the ocean by catching fish faster than they can reproduce while also destroying their nurseries,"
Marco Lambertini, head of WWF International.

Easy steps we can all take to protect our oceans include: Stoutly refusing to buy any water in plastic bottles. This can be done by:

- installing a good water filter at home so you can drink from the tap.
- carrying your own refillable glass or aluminum water bottle with you.

Using your own jute shopping bags or trolley at the supermarket and refusing to use their plastic bags. If you also remove all plastic packaging after checkout and leave it in the store they will soon get the message.

To quote Ryunosuke Satoro: *"Individually we are one drop, together we are an ocean"*

For more tips on protecting our oceans visit <https://www.theanimalfund.net/>

1. Dame Ellen MacArthur / 2. <https://www.plasticoceans.org/the-facts/> / 3. Davos 2016 / 4. The Blue Planet / 5. <http://ocean.si.edu>