

Tackling ocean plastic pollution for future generations



By **Anne Mäusbacher**
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About us

A few years ago, when I told people about my initiative, **Beach Cleaner**, I was often asked 'What was the point of the programme?' Being based in Nuremberg, Germany, we weren't exactly near the ocean and people would say, 'We don't live by the sea, so what's the ocean got to do with conservation?' I wanted to change that perception.

First, people needed to understand why **protecting the ocean is so important**.

So to name a few reasons:

- The ocean covers almost three quarters of the Earth's surface, contains 97 per cent of the Earth's water, and represents 99 per cent of the living space on the planet by volume.
- The ocean absorbs about 30 per cent of carbon dioxide produced by humans, buffering the impacts of global warming.
- The ocean gives us every second breath!

Unfortunately, the ocean is also **choking on plastics**, having an enormous impact on marine ecosystems, including seabirds, as well as an enormous impact on our health and survival as well.



Image from Sabrina Hashemi

Many of us have seen this form of pollution first-hand. What we use and discard in our daily lives on land can make its way to the ocean and coastlines. An average of 80 per cent of ocean plastic pollution comes from rivers and smaller water.

In Germany, local rivers meet the Rhine-Main-Danube canal, which connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea. It is a giant network of waterways, connecting water – the source of life – to people who depend on it, but it is suffering from high-levels of pollution. The same goes for the North and Baltic Sea that border the North of Germany.

The idea for my Initiative, 'Beach Cleaner' was born, not in Germany, but on an island in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015. I was surprised by how much trash was in the water and on the beaches: cigarette butts, single-use cups, PET bottles, balloons, picnic leftovers and lost fishing gear. I wondered where it all came from, and started to collect and remove it from the beach. No one else on the beach joined to help. Beach clean-ups weren't the norm then.



Image from Beach Cleaner

It got me thinking that I should start an initiative that would create opportunities for a larger wave of change-makers tackling the ocean plastic problem and advocating for plastic-free living and marine conservation. To raise interest and awareness of the plastic pollution problem, I started making shirts and bags, highlighting the issue and giving a link to my [educational website](#), based on many years of studying ocean pollution.

In 2015, I did an online study on marine litter powered by UNEP and the Open University in the Netherlands, where I learned about the existence of the [5 Gyres](#) (massive floating plastic trash islands in the middle of the ocean). I was shocked at how little media attention there was on this massive plastic problem and I wanted to share far and wide the precious knowledge I had learned on the programme. This led to the publication of my bilingual educational website, www.beachcleaner.de and my children's book, [Kids for the Ocean](#).

Beach Cleaner is a small movement created by a group of committed activists and supporters who have set a good example through their own changes in lifestyle and shopping behavior – showing that a plastic-free and a waste-reduced life is possible and feels good.

Anne Mäusbacher



KIDS for the OCEAN

Strategies and Initiatives for Everyday Life to Prevent
Plastic Pollution in the Ocean
- A Step-by-Step Guide for Families and Schools -



Image from Beach Cleaner

The aim of the initiative is to spread the word on plastic-free living and marine conservation. We give lectures and talks about the plastic-free living, organise **beach clean-ups** at home in our local communities, and wherever we travel, we use our different platforms, such as the legendary **Yoga-Sound and Sea festival** in Germany, to get the message out.

It's always surprising and very heartening how many families with little kids turn up to our clean-ups at our city beaches, parks and even at **river clean-ups**. The rain never stops them – they enthusiastically dredge up garbage from the river as if they were opening up Christmas gifts.

Kids are the decision-makers of tomorrow and the bearers to bring about change. Kids for the Ocean is a book for children above the age of six, which offers inspiration, solutions and encourages smart choices. To reach more schools, teachers and families with this message I have started to give school talks together with my beach cleaner partner Kathi Liss.



Image from Getty Images

We've also developed and introduced the **Kids for the Ocean education programme** for teachers and families. It's easy to incorporate into the school syllabus, or any type of teaching environment. It's for all children and is ideal for tips for everyday family life.

Our ocean is facing many stressors and we all need to work together to promote a healthy ocean. We must re-think our consumption habits, significantly reduce plastic production and pollution and to educate our kids (our future leaders) on how they can do a much better job looking after our planet, than we have done. After all we have no choice - there is no Planet B.

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This post is part of a series produced by Virgin Unite in partnership with Ocean Unite, an initiative to unite and activate powerful voices for ocean-conservation action.