

Scientists call for action on plastic waste

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Scientists from around the world have called for laws to tackle the growing problem of plastic waste.

Writing in *Nature* magazine, the team calls for some plastic items of waste to be classified as hazardous because of their effects on people and wildlife.

'We feel the physical dangers of [plastic debris](#) are well enough established, and the suggestions of the chemical dangers sufficiently worrying, that the biggest producers of [plastic waste](#) - the United States, Europe and China - must act now,' reads the report.

Research has shown that ecologically and commercially important species, such as mussels, corals and salt-marsh grasses, can either eat or become entangled in plastic waste.

There is also concern that plastic waste could allow [chemical pollutants](#) into the human food chain, as pollutants latch on to plastics eaten by seafood species.

Last month, I reported on research which showed more than a third of fish caught in the English Channel contained tiny fragments of plastic debris.

The author of that study, Professor Richard Thompson of Plymouth University, contributed to the Nature report.

'Working with the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) we have shown that over 370 species, including some that are critically endangered, ingest or become entangled in plastic debris,' says Thompson.

'The Nature report builds directly on our previous research, together with that of other leading world experts, and asks that we acknowledge these problems by reclassification of plastic waste as hazardous.'

'Acknowledging the problems associated with plastic waste is, in my opinion, a fundamental step toward achieving lasting solutions.'

Earlier this year, Unilever announced that it will cut plastic '[microbeads](#)' from all of its personal care products by 2015.

But the scientists, based in the UK, United States, Japan and Greece, say that it's time for governments to take action.

'With a change in plastics categorisation, numerous affected habitats could immediately be cleaned up under national legislation and using Government funds,' they say.

More information: www.nature.com/nature/journal/.../36/full/494169a.html

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