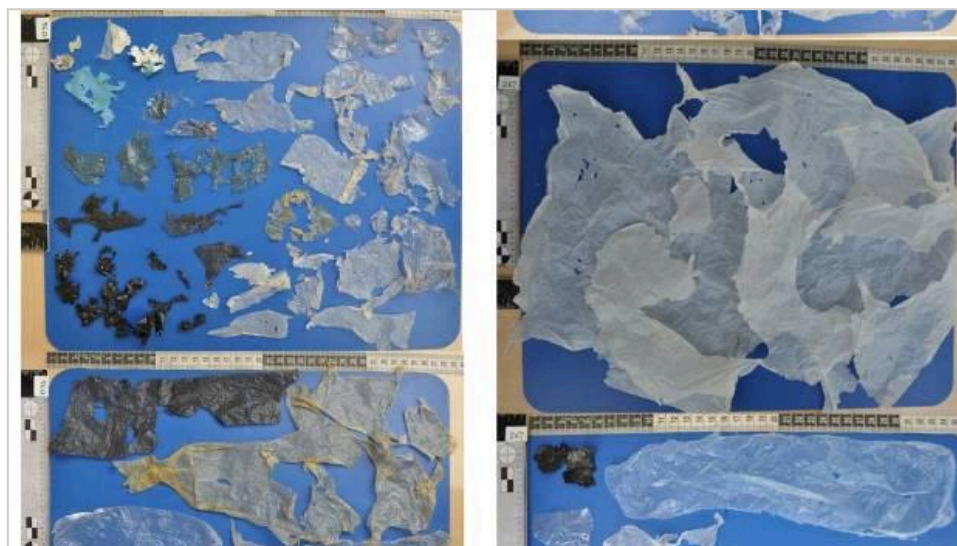


## A Third of turtles found dead on New Zealand beaches had ingested plastic

A third of turtles found dead on New Zealand beaches have swallowed plastic, an expert says, and single-use shopping bags are the most common culprit.

Dan Godoy, of Massey University's Coastal-Marine Research Group, said the turtles' intestinal tract got blocked when they mistook soft plastics for jellyfish, resulting in "horrific" deaths. "They can't digest food, and they basically slowly die," Godoy said.

The Government has been facing mounting pressure from local bodies, environmental groups, and schoolchildren to take action against the more than a billion plastic bags Kiwis discard annually. So far there's been no real movement on the problem.



Some of the samples of plastic found in turtles stomachs.

Godoy had studied the bodies of roughly 80 stranded turtles over the past six years, and said of those with plastic in their stomachs, about half had died as a direct result. He has seen instances where hard plastic had punctured the intestines and fishing line had cut through the intestinal wall, resulting in a horrific death for the reptile. "Marine turtles aren't the only ones, we are seeing this in a huge range of species – seabirds, even whales," he said.



Up to half of turtles found to have eaten plastic died directly as a result.

On one occasion he was able to tell by the label that the plastic wrapping had come from Lower Hutt. Two-thirds of the country's mayors have now signed **an open letter requesting central government impose a mandatory levy** on plastic bags, or step aside and allow local authorities to pick up the reins.

Last week, two students from Dunedin's Carisbrook School flew to Wellington to present a petition, signed by 3600 people, calling for a ban.



Plastic bags are the most common item found in the stomachs of stranded turtles, according to a researcher.

Meanwhile, **a second petition** from a group of Wellington students calling for a mandatory levy has garnered more than 10,400 signatures.

Godoy said the argument he had heard from Environment Minister Nick Smith in the past, that action was not needed because plastic bags made up only a small percentage of the waste stream, failed to look at the facts, or the environmental impact of plastic bags.

"It has a huge impact, because it looks like natural prey, it goes out in the oceans, it doesn't break down, and they float in the water column continuously until they are either ingested or entangle an animal," he said.

"It's a unnecessary item which represents completely a single-use waste society."  
Godoy said that around the world, studies found between 10 and 100 per cent of stranded turtles had plastic in their stomachs.

"In some parts of the East Coast or West Coast of South America for example, 100 per cent of stranded turtles had plastic in them of some sort."

- Stuff