

PRESS RELEASE: BY THE OCEAN WE UNITE - UP TO NORWAY

Plastic found in every water sample

First results of the scientific sailing expedition on the North Sea

They have been gone two weeks. The crew and participants of the first sailing expedition for cleaner oceans, organized by the Dutch foundation By the Ocean we Unite, are back. From the Netherlands to Norway scientific research about plastic on the water surface and on the sea floor was conducted whilst sailing. A somewhat sad conclusion: plastic is everywhere in our oceans.



After months of preparation the team left late August together with a group of enthusiastic participants from Rotterdam to Norway. "Luckily a lot is happening already, but there could be so much more scientific research on plastic pollution, new alternatives and raising awareness to the public. I am glad to see more people becoming enthusiastic about this", says Thomas van Thiel, fervent sailor and founder of the foundation.

Ten samples of the water surface were collected from the North Sea and Nordic fjords. The research net, made available by the Royal Dutch Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ), was repeatedly pulled through the water for an hour next to the ship. Five sea floor samples were also collected in the fjords. The water surface samples will be researched by the Wageningen University for the quantity of plastic. The sea floor samples were delivered to researchers of the International Research Institute Stavanger, which will assess the quantity of plastic present in the samples together with the Uni Research Institute Bergen (both located in Norway).

During handling the surface samples on board, there was initially determined that every sample contains plastic, ranging from pieces of foil of centimetres big to miniscule pieces of polystyrene. A lot of the plastic, so-called micro and nano plastic, cannot be seen with the naked eye. These particles are so small they can potentially enter cells in the bodies of people and animals, but little is known about the consequences of this. "What we know about plastic is scary, but what we don't know is a lot scarier", states Nanne van Hoytema, coordinator of the scientific research. Laboratory measurements will have to prove how much plastic really is present. The results are expected to be published at the beginning of 2017.

Aside from the By the Ocean we Unite team and the crew, a number of paying expedition members were among the boat members of the sailing expedition ship Fantastiko. They tried different alternatives for plastic and actively participated in the research. In order to rid the Norway beaches of plastic waste, a number of beach clean ups were also organized with, among others, biology students of the University of Bergen. In Stavanger, the team visited the international school to teach multiple classes about plastic pollution. Additionally, the participants raised an amount of money to invest in other initiatives aimed at reducing plastic pollution. "Because", according to Van Thiel, "working together is crucial in solving this problem"

At the end of this year a documentary about this expedition will be released. In 2017, new (educational) expeditions will be organized for both adults as well as children. Interested? The next informational evening is Sunday 9 October in Rotterdam.

Editorial note

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