

21st International Conference of The Coastal Society

Marine Debris Knowledge: Using the Best Science to Guide Our Efforts

Kristine McElwee, I.M. Systems Group, NOAA Marine Debris Program

Scientific knowledge is used to build awareness, guide policy development, identify research gaps, and support management decisions. Within the field of marine debris, a body of scientific literature exists from beach monitoring surveys, studies of marine debris impacts on several species, and regional surveys of debris threats. Partly as a result of this research, there has been a groundswell of interest in marine debris, evidenced by legislative activity and media and Internet coverage. Science is one of several factors that can influence policy and management. Because resources to address marine debris are limited, it is important that scientific findings be communicated clearly to decision-makers. Given marine debris's wide geographic range, our knowledge of its distribution and impacts—particularly in submerged, open-ocean, and remote areas—may not be sufficient to guide management actions. By relying on limited and narrowly focused data sets, we may expend critical resources on areas and debris types that turn out not to address the most severe impacts. The presentation will provide examples of scientific results that have been extrapolated beyond the original findings or used out of context. These examples will highlight the need for targeted and accurately communicated research to guide marine debris policy and management, as well as careful examination of advocacy arguments that may be presented as scientific findings. Audience members will be encouraged to share ideas on how to interpret and communicate scientific results to promote an accurately informed public, guide policy development, and target marine debris management efforts.

Kristine McElwee
NOAA Marine Debris Program
I.M. Systems Group
737 Bishop Street, Suite 2250
Honolulu, HI 96813
kris.mcelwee@noaa.gov