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#CHASINGPELLETS: in pursuit of plastic pellets in the Mediterranean



Pellets in Tarragona: a Coastal Defenders campaign since 2020

In 2018, a group of Spanish Ocean enthusiasts from Good Karma Projects, an environmental NGO based in Catalunya **reported, for the first time, the massive presence of plastic pellets on the beach of La Pineda, in Vila-seca**. These small spheres of plastic used as raw material in the manufacture of most plastic items can be spilled at every stage of the value chain and we know they are handled in huge quantities by **the biggest petrochemical complex in Southern Europe, in Tarragona, a few kilometers away from the sea**.

Never degrading, these plastic pellets (also poetically called "Mermaid Tears", completely out of touch with the seriousness of their consequences) cause irreversible damage to marine biodiversity: they gradually integrate the food chain through the fish we eat and can also be vectors for the deployment of bacteria and chemical contaminants in aquatic environments.

Because of waves and winds, **pellets can be found every day on the beach**. Higher amounts can also be observed during meteorological phenomena such as the Filomena storm of January 2021. Good Karma has been observing and monitoring their presence on the beach several times. In 2018, Greenpeace shared that around 120 millions of pellet could be found on the beach¹.

As part of its fight against microplastic pollution and of its advocacy activities towards the European Union, **Surfrider Foundation Europe and its Spanish delegation joined Good Karma Projects in Autumn 2020** through its Surfrider Coastal Defenders program, to support this local fight and continue to require a legal response to this pollution from Member States and the European Union, which are much aware of the devastating impacts of this pollution at the EU and global level.

Operation Clean Sweep: the false good deed of the plastic industry?

Despite repeated calls from environmental NGOs such as Surfrider Europe to take this pollution seriously and adopt measures - [Surfrider Europe published a detailed report last November](#) on this very issue - and strong evidence of industry's full responsibility, the plastics industry continues to oppose the adoption of a new legislation on plastic pellets. How? By making the case for leaving it to the industry to deal with this pollution through its voluntary initiative called *Operation Clean Sweep* (OCS). This initiative which provides guidelines for best practices to prevent pellet loss into the environment was initiated by the industry itself. **By joining OCS, companies are supposed to commit to respecting a series of best practices on handling pellets and preventing losses. Yet, despite this initiative running for years, pellets are still present**, in destructive numbers, in the vicinity of the industrial area of Tarragona, proving Operation Clean Sweep's incapacity to address the issue effectively, with thousands to millions of pellets continuing to pollute the Mediterranean Sea.

Recent discoveries on this pollution case

In December 2020, after running the first assessments only focusing on the beach of la Pineda, Good Karma Projects with support from Surfrider Europe **decided to continue their investigation inland, following the Francoli River**, which flows through the petrochemical area. In coordination with Surfrider Europe, Good Karma Projects recently presented the progress of its study during the Spanish National Environmental Congress - CONAMA - held in Madrid at the end of May 2021. "The emission sources of plastic pellets are clear; we have found them in all the streams and rivers located near the companies that produce or handle them. **There are significant concentrations of pellets in streams up to 20 km inland.**" says Jordi Oliva from Good Karma Projects.

#Chasingpellets: a new expedition to continue monitoring pellets throughout the Mediterranean Sea

Several kilometers away from Tarragona, in the Balearic Islands, other NGOs such as “Save the med” or “ Per la Mar Viva” **reported that they were finding significant amounts of pellets on their coasts too.** Considering the direction of the Mistral wind which is blowing in this area and the orientation of the Balearics coasts in relation to Tarragona, a question came to the mind of the Good Karma Project and Surfrider teams. **Would the pellets found on the beaches of the Balearic Islands be identical to those found in the Francoli river and on the beaches of La Pineda?** That’s why Good Karma Projects and Surfrider Foundation Europe launch, this June 19, 2021, the expedition #ChasingPellets. For ten days, Jordi Oliva, Albert Font de Rubinat, both founders of Good Karma Projects and Simon Witt, Head of Surfrider Europe's Coastal Defenders program will aim to collect pellets present in the Mediterranean using a Manta Trawl, between Tarragona and the Balearic Islands. Accompanied by Marta Sugrañes biologist and oceanographer working on monitoring within Good Karma Projects, **the team will bring samples back from their sailing trip which will be analysed with the technical and scientific help of the University of Barcelona.**

With the help of Ainhoa Muñoz, a photographer who will share daily pictures of the expedition, the activists will try to show the extent of the damage, demonstrating that the pellets possibly spilled by the Tarragona industrial area are spread at sea, hundreds of kilometers away from their origin.

Beyond informing Spanish and European citizens about this pollution, this expedition aims above all to alert public decision-makers on the ineffectiveness of voluntary initiatives such as Operation Clean Sweep and to urge them to adopt new laws to oblige the whole plastic pellet chain to stop spilling pellets and control their actions. To make it a real success, do not hesitate to share, throughout the trip, our photos and videos under the hashtag #ChasingPellets!

[Images available here](#)

[Link to replay the press conference translated in English](#)



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<https://www.diaridetarragona.com/costa/La-playa-de-La-Pineda-acumula-mas-de-120-millones-de-bolas-de-plastico-20190317-0014.html>