

Butting in to protect sanctuary

Students lobby for cigarettes and plastics to be banned at 'delicate and diverse' Ricketts Point

Paul Shapiro



Beaumaris Secondary College students Alex Stefanatos, Ellen Quinn and Nathan Palmer.
Picture: Wayne Taylor

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A school group not willing to wait for politicians to step in and protect Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary from pollution are taking matters into their own hands.

Beaumaris Secondary College marine science students have joined forces with the Marine Education Science and Community Centre Inc (MESAC) to launch the No Smoking in Ricketts Point Sanctuary campaign.

Both groups are lobbying for cigarettes and plastics to be banned. The campaigners have already started regular beach patrols to clear the sanctuary of discarded butts and plastic trash.

Beaumaris Secondary foundation teacher Chelsie Millar said they wanted to protect the "delicate and diverse" sanctuary.

"Our students are very aware of what goes on in their local environment and they want to do something about it," she said.

Ms Millar said she was concerned that it only took 10 minutes to fill up a large container with cigarette butts.

"(Butts) release carcinogens and bio-toxins into the ecosystem which has adverse impacts on the marine invertebrates and the entire food chain," she said.

"We are starting to spend a lot of time at the sanctuary with our teaching and learning, classifying species and looking at the human impact of the marine ecosystem and it needs to be protected."

MESAC spokeswoman Virginia Mosk said despite their work the pollution problem was getting worse rather than better.

"Sea life have their water polluted and ingest these toxic butts, as well as sometimes feeding them to their babies by accident, causing terrible painful deaths," she said. MESAC has the support of Beach Patrol Australia, the Port Phillip EcoCentre and Bayside Councillor Clarke Martin.

The campaign is part of a push to secure \$20 million to enhance and greater protect the sanctuary.

Details: change.org/p/no-smoking-inand-around-the-unique-ricketts-pointmarine-sanctuary

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