
Marine litter and the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Balearic Islands, Spain: A Retrospective Study

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 health crisis, tourism within the Balearic Islands was at an all-time low due to local, regional, and global travel restrictions. Marine litter was collected in the surrounding coastal region of the Balearic Islands from 2016 to 2019 and after the pandemic in 2021 through the local government's sea cleaning boat service. The fleet of between 25 and 30 boats, collected floating marine litter of which plastic was consistently the most common item collected (61%) with an average of 41.9 ± 63.6 kg/km² pre-pandemic (2019) and an average of 32.5 ± 46.0 kg/km² (2021) post-pandemic. Furthermore, an increase in plastic marine litter was positively correlated with tourism during the summer months. In terms of marine litter in marine reserves, no significant differences were observed, an indication of the ubiquity of floating marine litter in the Balearic Islands. Overall, despite the decrease in coastal and maritime activities during and during the year following the COVID-19 pandemic, floating plastic debris was habitual, indicating the potential longevity of floating debris and the gravity of the situation throughout the marine environment.

Keywords: marine litter, floating, covid, 19, plastic pollution

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