Teachers ‘go wild’ to help marine life

A GROUP of teachers is heading to North Stradbroke Island today to help tackle the global issue of marine debris, and help scientists gather the information needed to protect Australia’s marine wildlife.

Marine debris is largely made up of plastic, glass and fishing nets. It affects more than 270 species of animals worldwide, yet little is known about the full impact of marine debris on wildlife.

TeachWild – developed by Earthwatch Australia, in partnership with CSIRO and Founding Partner Shell – is a three-year national marine debris research and education program designed to help Australians understand the extent of the global issue of marine debris and its impacts on wildlife.

The TeachWild 7-day field program involves teachers from across Australia and scientists from CSIRO and The University of Queensland.

Teachers will assist the scientists in a range of marine debris surveys.

Dr Kathy Townsend from the University of Queensland has so far found that up to 35 per cent of sea turtles in the area have died due to marine rubbish, through a combination of ingestion and/or entanglement.

“Turtles are often more susceptible than other marine animals to marine rubbish, as they do not have the ability to regurgitate,” Dr Townsend said.

“Once a turtle ingests this type of rubbish the gut becomes paralysed and gases build up in the turtle’s stomach, which cause it to float and make it unable to dive for food. It’s a slow, painful death.”

To find out more, visit teachwild.org.au