# Plastic Pollution in the Arctic: How the linear economy is failing remote communities and pristine places

*Study reviews the impact and solutions to plastic in polar regions, and suggests the linear economy is obsolete, causing undue harm.*

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LOS ANGELES, CA – In 2016 the 5 Gyres Institute traveled across the Canadian Arctic from Greenland to Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, discovering abundant microplastics with sources from tourism, maritime activities, and communities that import goods in a linear economic system that doesn't provide a return trip for trash. The result is landfilling, open-pit incineration and loss to the environment.

The linear economy is designed by industry to deflect responsibility for materials management and instead place that burden on municipalities, consumers and taxpayers. Increasingly, city budgets are experiencing economic strain and are shifting revenue to higher priority community needs, like health care, education and other services, leaving waste management as a lower priority. It is essential that managing plastics and other materials be designed into a circular economy.

Proposed solutions include:

- International agreements for tourism best practices
- Incentives and port facilities that recover derelict or lost fishing gear
- Producer responsibility for material recovery and transport

Currently, there are international agreements and policy directives that address tourism (Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO), Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)) and derelict fishing gear (Arctic Marine Litter project, The Arctic Marine Strategic Plan 2015–2025, The Regional Action Plan (RAP) on Marine Litter), yet the linear economy continues to import products and packaging to remote, rural and low income communities

without a viable plan for material recovery.

We are now seeing major consumer brands endorse a fee on virgin resin to boost plastic recovery. Through the Consumer Brands Association trade group, a surcharge would be placed on virgin resin to correct the disparity with recycled materials. If waste plastic had value, then the economics of the round-trip would make sense. A similar proposal by the Mindaroo Foundation calls for a resin-fee to pay for the round-trip for trash.

By supporting a resin fee to fund materials management and enforce policies to reduce impacts from tourism, shipping and fishing activities, polar regions and the people that live there can eliminate the harm from plastic pollution.

*5 Gyres is nonprofit organization focused on stopping the flow of plastic pollution through science, education, and adventure. We employ a science to solutions model to empower community action, engaging our global network in leveraging science to stop plastic pollution at the source.*

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