



swimming in rubbish

Batoko is a swimwear brand with a twist: they're rubbish. Literally.

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Their office is based in Lancashire on the North-West Coast of England, where they're turning plastic waste into fun, high quality swimsuits in an effort to clean up our oceans. Creative director Melanie Bonsor says so far, they've recycled the equivalent weight of 146,000 plastic bottles.

What inspires your quirky designs? Our designs are a celebration of nature and the wonderful creatures that share our planet.

Why do you use recycled plastic in your swimsuits? Living by the sea, we witness plastic pollution on our local beaches every day. Plastic bottles, bags, cups, straws, food wrappers, textiles and microplastics. We were volunteering with our local beach clean-up group but wanted to do more, we wanted to

get stuck in at the source of the issue – manufacturing. And we wanted to use art and our voice to spread this important message.

What's the process behind making your eco-friendly swimsuits? Our swimwear is recycled from plastic waste such as plastic bottles, bags and even carpets. The plastic is shredded into flakes, melted down and spun into polyester yarn. The amount of plastic that goes into making our swimwear is recorded by weight and is the equivalent of approximately 10 plastic bottles per swimsuit.

How does Batoko benefit the environment? We're part of a positive process attempting to clean up our oceans and help reduce the negative impact of plastic on the environment.

We want to show that slowing down the production of new plastic materials in favour of using existing sustainable resources is the way forward.

How bad is the issue of ocean plastic? Of the 300 million tons of plastic produced globally each year, it's estimated less than 10% of this is recycled, with an astonishing 8 million tons of disposed plastic waste entering our oceans annually. The issue with this – plastic doesn't degrade. Once we've made it, used it and binned it – it stays with us, breaking down into smaller toxic pieces that pollute our environment for generations.

What's the main source of ocean plastic? Plastic can enter the ocean a number of different ways: littering, poorly managed waste systems, overfilled landfills. Litter



is a big issue – even if you are hundreds of miles away from the ocean, litter can blow into rivers that lead out to oceans, it can wash down drains and enter sewage systems that become blocked and spill out to sea via storm drains. Growing research shows us this type of pollution can come in many unexpected forms, such as from clothing we wear. When tiny fibres shed from our synthetic clothing and enter our oceans, this is known as microfibre pollution. These tiny plastic fibres stay in the environment for decades, just as plastic bottles do. The best way to reduce this type of pollution is to wash your clothing less.

You're a member of the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) – helping to protect our oceans. What other environmental groups are you linked with and how do they play their part in

eradicating ocean plastic? We are proud to be a member of the UK's leading marine charity. The MCS work to ensure our seas are healthy, pollution free and protected. To date they have helped pass a number of government legislations such as the 5p plastic bag policy, gained protection for endangered Basking sharks and secured 50 marine conservation zones in English waters. MCS have also removed 6 million pieces of litter from UK shores.

It's so important that we give back and work closely with organisations and not-for-profits, big and small. We recently donated our swimwear for the Galapagos Conservation Trust to help raise funds for their Shark Conservation Program. We also have an exciting collaboration coming at the end of the year with Action for Dolphins and hope to work

with some smaller, local organisations here where we live.

How can we go about cleaning up our oceans individually? Just by taking notice and being aware of the amount of plastic we are using every day we can learn to make better choices. Finding reusable alternatives makes a huge difference – making the swap from disposable water bottles to a reusable bottle will save so much plastic, as will ditching single-use plastic straws and taking your own bag out shopping. Volunteering a couple of hours with your local beach clean-up group is not only great for the environment but a fun way to meet awesome, like-minded people. Don't live near the coast? Clean-up groups are also tackling parks, riverbanks and lakes – just search your area online!