

Marine life contribute to ocean plastic spread

A SINGLE carrier bag in the ocean can be shredded into 1.7 million pieces, scientists have found.

Marine wildlife may be unwitting contributors to the spread of microplastics that threatens them.

A crustacean in northern and western Europe known as *Orchestia gammarellus* was found to be capable of breaking a single plastic bag into 1.75 million fragments.

The creature appears to mistake plastic waste in the ocean for food and swallow it, according to scientists at the University of Plymouth.

Their previous research found more than 700 marine

species had encountered plastic debris, with clear evidence that ingestion and entanglement harmed them.

Professor Richard Thompson, head of the university's International Marine Litter Research Unit, said: "An estimated 120 million tonnes of single-use plastic items, such as carrier bags, are produced each year and they are one of the main sources of plastic pollution.

"They already represent a potential hazard to marine life, but this research shows species might also be contributing to the spread of debris."

Their research appeared in *Marine Pollution Bulletin*.

Courier Mail 14 Dec 2017