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Half a million crabs killed by plastic debris on remote islands

In the first study of its kind, an IMAS-led research team estimates that around 570 000 hermit crabs have been killed on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the Indian Ocean and Henderson Island in the Pacific after being trapped in plastic debris.

[Published in the Journal of Hazardous Materials](#), the study was carried out by researchers who previously revealed that [Cocos](#) and [Henderson](#) islands are littered with millions of pieces of plastic.

The hermit crab study found that piles of plastic pollution on beaches create both a physical barrier and a series of potentially deadly traps for crabs.

IMAS's Dr Jennifer Lavers, who led the studies, said that while considerable attention had been given to plastic pollution in the marine environment, little research had been done into the risk that marine pollution poses to wildlife.

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"Hermit crabs play a crucial role in the health of tropical environments by aerating and fertilising soil, and dispersing seeds and removing detritus, as well being a key part of the marine ecosystem.

"Their population degradation is more than just a risk to the natural environment.

"They are also an important part of marine ecosystems that humans rely on for fishing, recreation and tourism, so ultimately the impacts may also be economic.

"Our study is the first to document the mortality of hermit crabs due to beach debris but the broader global picture remains unknown.

"However, it is likely that the mortality