



Balloon releases have become a popular tool at promotional events or to celebrate a wedding, birth or memorial. The effect on the wildlife can be detrimental. Join us in our pledge to prevent further balloon releases and promote sustainable and eco-friendly alternatives. This guide gives you some tools to take action against this avoidable pollution.

At high altitudes balloons shatter into spaghetti like pieces, and when landing in the ocean they can be mistaken for jelly fish by turtles. In the water it takes up to four years for a balloon to break down. During this time animals can die through ingestion or entanglement, especially when strings and clips are attached to the balloon.

Credit left: Balloonsblow; right: Marine Litter Management Centre



How to take action

People releasing balloons are usually not aware of the issue and have no intention to do any harm. Education is needed to fill those gaps and to prevent future balloon releases. If you want to play your part in our cause you can take action in different ways:

1. Pick up and dispose of balloons you find to prevent wildlife from interacting with it.
2. Educate your friends, family and community about this issue.
3. When hearing about a planned balloon release send letters to the organisers asking for alternative ways to celebrate. Use our letter templates below.
4. When finding a balloon that can be tracked to its source through a promotional print, take a photo of the balloon where you found it, find out the contact details of the company and send a letter and the photo to the manager. Use our letter templates below.
5. At Tangaroa Blue we are keen to hear your story. Let us know what actions you took and what the response was: email info@tangaroablue.org.

How to fill out the templates

Below you will find three templates for different scenarios to address private groups and companies:

1. **Letter to prevent a planned balloon release of a business**
2. **Letter to prevent a planned balloon release of a private function**
3. **Letter to the manager of a company after a balloon release**

Copy the text of your template into a Word document if the formatting allows or into a Notepad and edit your template according to your situation by filling in the gaps and choosing/deleting applicable/non applicable sections. Tips on how to fill out this form are in *italics* and together with the footnotes are intended to be deleted.



Case study

Cape Kimberley in Far North QLD is a local marine debris hot spot and balloons are a common item found on this beach. In December 2015 during one beach walk 45 balloons were collected, some of them could be identified through their promotional print: The balloon from the Cairns Post, a local newspaper in Cairns, must have travelled 77 km as the crow flies. The balloon from the Greencross Vet in Townsville must have travelled 360 km.



Left: 45 balloons were found in Cape Kimberley on a single beach walk in Dec 2015.

Centre and right: Two of the balloons that could be identified.

Action taken

The contact details of both businesses were researched and the distance travelled by the balloons estimated on Google Earth. Photos of the balloons in the field proved the case and letter template 3 ("**Letter to the manager of a company after a balloon release**") was filled out and sent to the managers of both businesses.

Response

Both businesses replied very timely and made clear that they **are** passionate about the environment and had no intention to do any harm, but never considered the impact balloons can have. As a consequence, they both agreed to review their promotion strategies and the use of balloons:

Cairns Post:

"...Although we are very careful at The Cairns Post not to have our products reach any drains and/or released into the environment we have not taken into consideration where our products may lead to once they have left our care. I will endeavour to help preserve our beautiful rain-forests and Great Barrier Reef by advocating a healthy environment when planning all future promotional items associated with The Cairns Post products."

Greencross Vets:

"...Your message has most definitely had impact and the consideration to replace balloons with an alternative promotional item is already in discussion and is being reviewed with the events team. Greencross Vets is passionate about pets and the environment in which many of the animals and wildlife we treat reside. Thank you for bringing this to our attention."

What great success! Remember to share your experience with Tangaroa Blue to celebrate! Let us know what actions you took and what the response was: email info@tangaroablue.org.



1. Letter to prevent a planned balloon release of a business

Dear Sir or Madam,

we heard that you are planning to release helium filled balloons during your event on theⁱ.

Whilst we understand your desire to draw attention to your business we are concerned about the environmental impact and subsequently negative reputation a balloon release might cause your business. We believe that this is not the connection you want to be made when promoting your business.

Released balloons can drift hundreds of kilometres before descending, often landing directly in the ocean or in waterways that lead to the sea. Contrary to common believe, balloons do not degrade rapidly. It takes months for them to decompose and in the ocean up to four years. Ribbons or clips attached remain in the environment for decades. Under the Litter Act 1979 items become litter when they are deposited on land or in water - an illegal act. In the case of balloons littering occurs when they land.

The effect balloons can have on wildlife is well documented: Terrestrial and marine animals such as dogs, farm animals, turtles or whales have been found with balloons in their stomach which can clog their intestines, leading to starvation and often to death. Sea birds, turtles and other animals have also been found with balloon ribbons wrapped around their limbs or necks, causing the loss of the limb or killing the animal.

(Choose the applicable/delete the non-applicable option below):

1. For events close (up to 100 km) to a World Heritage Site (e.g. Great Barrier Reef), National Park or waterway that lead to one of the above: Considering the close proximity of your event to theⁱⁱ your released balloons would pose a potential risk to species in a protected area and decrease the beauty of a region with outstanding natural value.

2. For events in urban/non protected areas: Your released balloons would pose a potential risk to domestic and wild animals and contribute to the general litter issues that we are facing in Australia's environment.

We believe you were not aware of these facts and would not want your business to be linked to such sad and concerning circumstances, potentially causing injury or death to a (possibly endangered) animal. Therefore we ask you to consider options that favour your business **and** the environment such as

- colourful banners/flags etc.
- flying kites on the day of the event
- giant bubbles
- a kid's attraction like a jumping castle

- inflatable statues as an eye catcher
- If the use of balloons is unavoidable, fill them with air, tie them down to prevent them from getting carried by the wind and after the event pop them and dispose them off properly.

Thank you for considering our concerns regarding balloons releases and our pledge to refrain from this avoidable pollution in the future to promote a business that cares for its customers **and** Australia's natural assets.

Kind regards,

ⁱ date

ⁱⁱ name of the World Heritage Site, National Park or otherwise outstanding natural asset



2. Letter to prevent a planned balloon release of a private function

Dear celebrant,

we heard that you are planning to release helium filled balloons during your event on the

Whilst we understand your desire to express your emotions in a colourful and memorable way we are concerned about the environmental impact a balloon release will cause and believe that this is not your intention when celebrating a loved one.

Released balloons can drift hundreds of kilometres before descending, often landing directly in the ocean or in waterways that lead to the sea. Contrary to common believe, balloons do not degrade rapidly. It takes months for them to decompose and in the ocean up to four years. Ribbons or clips attached remain in the environment for decades. Under the Litter Act 1979 items become litter when they are deposited on land or in water - an illegal act. In the case of balloons littering occurs when they land.

The effect balloons can have on wildlife is well documented: Terrestrial and marine animals such as dogs, farm animals, turtles or whales have been found with balloons in their stomach which can clog their intestines, leading to starvation and often to death. Sea birds, turtles and other animals have also been found with balloon ribbons wrapped around their limbs or necks, causing the loss of the limb or killing the animal.

(Choose the applicable/delete the non-applicable option below):

1. *For events close (up to 100 km) to a World Heritage Site (e.g. Great Barrier Reef), National Park or waterway that lead to one of the above:* Considering the close proximity of your event to theⁱⁱ your released balloons would pose a potential risk to species in a protected area and decrease the beauty of a region with outstanding natural value.

2. *For events in urban/non protected areas:* Your released balloons would pose a potential risk to domestic and wild animals and contribute to the general litter issues that we are facing in Australia's environment.

We believe you were not aware of these facts and would not want your celebration to be linked to such sad and concerning circumstances, potentially causing injury or death to a (possibly endangered) animal in the name of a loved one. Therefore we ask you to consider other options for your celebration that do not cause harm to our wildlife such as

- colourful banners/flags etc.
- flying kites
- giant bubbles
- planting a tree
- floating flower petals

- lighting candles
- ribbon dancers

Thank you for considering our concerns regarding balloon releases and our pledge to refrain from this avoidable pollution. Celebrating in a way that favours your loved one **and** Australia's wildlife is the better option for everyone involved.

Kind regards,

ⁱ date

ⁱⁱ name of the World Heritage Site, National Park or otherwise outstanding natural asset



3. Letter to the manager of a company after a balloon release

Dear Sir or Madam,

On theⁱ we found a balloon with promotional print from your business onⁱⁱ. This location indicates that the balloon must have travelled app.ⁱⁱⁱ km.

(Choose the applicable/delete the non-applicable option below):

1. For balloons shattered into a spaghetti shape: The spaghetti like shape shows that the balloon was filled with helium, released and then rose to about 8500 m where it shattered before returning to earth and ending up in the environment.

2. For deflated balloons, not shattered: We assume that this balloon was once filled with helium, released and then drifted with the wind before deflating and returning back to earth and ending up in the environment.

In fact, released balloons can drift hundreds of kilometres before descending, often landing directly in the ocean or in waterways that lead to the sea. Contrary to common believe, balloons do not degrade rapidly. It takes months for them to decompose and in the ocean up to four years. Ribbons or clips attached remain in the environment for decades. Under the Litter Act 1979 items become litter when they are deposited on land or in water - an illegal act. In the case of balloons littering occurs when they land.

Finding promotional balloons from your business in the environment concerns us as the effect they can have on wildlife is well documented: Terrestrial and marine animals such as dogs, farm animals, turtles or whales have been found with balloons in their stomach which can clog their intestines, leading to starvation and often to death. Sea birds, turtles and other animals have also been found with balloon ribbons wrapped around their limbs or necks, causing the loss of the limb or killing the animal.

(Choose the applicable/delete the non-applicable option below):

1. For businesses close (up to 100 km) to a World Heritage Site (e.g. Great Barrier Reef), National Park or waterway that lead to one of the above: Considering the close proximity of your business to the^{iv} your released balloons pose a potential risk to species in a protected area and decrease the beauty of a region with outstanding natural value.

2. For businesses in urban/non protected areas: Your released balloons pose a potential risk to domestic and wild animals and contribute to the general litter issues that we are facing in Australia's environment.

Whilst we understand the attraction that helium balloons pose during a promotional event we are sure that you didn't intend your marketing tool to cause such sad and concerning reflections on your

business and that you wouldn't want to see your name on a balloon linked to a dead (and possibly endangered) animal. We would like to see you celebrate your business in a way that is favourable for both your business **and** the environment.

Attractive alternatives you could look into for future events to draw people's attention are

- colourful banners/flags etc.
- flying kites on the day of the event
- giant bubbles
- a kid's attraction like a jumping castle
- inflatable statues as an eye catcher
- If the use of balloons is unavoidable fill them with air, tie them down to prevent them from getting carried by the wind and after the event pop them and dispose them off properly.

We hope you understand our concerns regarding balloons releases and refrain from this avoidable pollution in the future, promoting a business that cares for its customers **and** Australia's natural assets.

Attached is a photo of the balloon.

Kind regards,

ⁱ date

ⁱⁱ detailed location, i.e. the beach or other habitat where it was found and other descriptive circumstances (e.g. floating in the water, wrapped around vegetation, wrapped around an animal etc., attach photos if applicable)

ⁱⁱⁱ distance between where the balloon was found and the location of the business where it might have been released

^{iv} name of the World Heritage Site, National Park or otherwise outstanding natural asset