

Surf spots polluted with waste

op surfing destinations in Bali are showing signs of pollution, with incidents of people getting infections after surfing the waves off the island's southern beaches.

Massive development along coastal areas that had yet to be balanced with proper waste management had increased pollution, said Oliver Crowell, cofounder of Project Clean Uluwatu — a non-profit organization working on waste management to preserve Uluwatu. "The problem of water contamination in surf spots has become very alarming," he said.

"As the coasts of Bali get more developed, pollution will multiply exponentially. More and more people will be getting very sick at the beach. Last year, before our [waste management] system was installed, there were record numbers of Uluwatu surfers with severely infected cuts, ears and eyes, and — most alarming, chronic typhus," he said.

A number of expatriates joining the Ungasan to Uluwatu Community Action Group on social media have also complained about waste being transported in large trucks to be dumped from the bridge onto Padang Padang Beach. Commenting on this, Crowell said that waste being dumped in waterways was common practice.

"I think it's standard procedure all over Bali. It's been happening for decades. Even if big hotels and restaurants hire a waste removal service, there is no guarantee that the waste will end up being dealt with responsibly after it leaves their property. It is up to these businesses to take full responsibility and find out where their waste is actually going."

He was concerned that Bali's modern development, designed by western-educated entrepreneurs, would continue without any responsible waste treatment solutions being put in place. "I feel that the moratorium on new hotel development should go into effect until the government can figure out a waste solution to handle the current situation," he said.

Surfer Tim Hain, who is general manager of the Asian Surfing Championship Tour, shared similar concerns that surfers were at risk of getting infections in the island's contaminated sea water.

"Surfers need clean water, otherwise ear infections, sinus infections and skin infections will result, not to mention stomach ache and diarrhea from ingesting contaminated water," he said. "Kuta Beach, Canggu, Uluwatu and other places like that all would report similar problems. I don't have any statistics, but I'm 100 percent sure that is true, both in the dry and wet seasons."

He shared a story that an expat had tested water from the beach near his house and told the laboratory it was from his well. "The lab guy said it was very contaminated and that maybe his septic system was leaking into the water supply. The expat then told the lab guy that it was actually from the beach, and the lab guy freaked out, telling him not to tell anyone because he was specifically instructed by government authorities never to say that the beach water was contaminated. That was a couple of years ago or more, so I imagine it's a lot worse now."

World champion surfer Kelly Slater also previously shared his concern about pollution in the island's waters on Twitter. "If Bali doesn't do something serious about this pollution, it'll be impossible to surf here in a few years. Worst I've ever seen," he told 180,000 personal followers.

Hain, however, still had hope that although the pollution could become worse, the island's beaches would remain surfable. But at the end of the day, he added, the uncontrolled building of hotels and shopping centers without regard for the island's capacity, and the poor sewage handling would soon make it difficult for locals and tourists alike to enjoy Bali's beaches and swim in its oceans safely. Recently, Bali Environment Agency (BLH) said that waste from hospitals, hotels and other industries did not meet the required criteria for waterway disposal.

In an analysis of waste quality last year, the agency took samples from 20 locations in Denpasar and several regencies. The locations comprised 16 state and private hospitals, two hotels, one fish processing unit and one dairy farm. The results of various physical, chemical and microbiological tests showed that the waste contaminating the waterways was a health hazard. For that reason, tighter controls needed to be implemented. minimize air pollution," he said.