

# Microplastic and tar pollution on three Canary Islands beaches: An annual study

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## Abstract

Marine debris accumulation was analyzed from three exposed beaches of the Canary Islands (Lambra, Famara and Las Canteras). Large microplastics (1-5 mm), mesoplastics (5-25 mm) and tar pollution were assessed twice a month for a year. There was great spatial and temporal variability in the Canary Island coastal pollution. Seasonal patterns differed at each location, marine debris concentration depended mainly of local-scale wind and wave conditions. The most polluted beach was Lambra, a remote beach infrequently visited. The types of debris found were mainly preproduction resin pellets, plastic fragments and tar, evidencing that pollution was not of local origin, but it comes from the open sea. The levels of pollution were similar to those of highly industrialized and contaminated regions. This study corroborates that the Canary Islands are an area of accumulation of mi-

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croplastics and tar rafted from the North Atlantic Ocean by the southward flowing Canary Current.

*Keywords:* marine debris, microplastic, tar, resin pellets, pollution, Canary Islands

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## 1. Introduction

Plastic, due its properties such as durability, impermeability and low cost production, has become essential in our daily life. Microplastics (<5 mm) and mesoplastics (5-25 mm) includes synthetic fibres, microbeads, preproduction resin pellets and fragments derived from larger plastics. These small pieces of plastic become one of the most common and persistent pollutants of the sea and beaches around the world (Derraik, 2002; Moore, 2008; Ryan et al., 2009; C3zar et al., 2014; Eriksen et al., 2014). In the early 1970s, scientists tried to alert society about this problem (Carpenter and Smith, 1972; Carpenter et al., 1972), but their warning was largely ignored. Now, almost five decades later, the reality is worse than expected; the size of plastic particles is getting smaller, their abundance is increasing, and their distribution is becoming global (Moore, 2008; Thompson et al., 2009). In the North Pacific Central Gyre, the mass of plastic was six times higher than plankton biomass (Moore et al., 2001). C3zar et al. (2014) reported 7,000 to 35,000 tonnes of plastic in the total ocean and Eriksen et al. (2014) estimated that 5.125 trillion particles, weighing 268,940 tons, are currently floating at sea. However, the concentration of particles <4.75 mm is 100 orders of magnitude lower than the total estimate, based on rates of fragmentation of plastic debris that has been dumped into the sea since the 70s, thus a significant

21 portion of microplastics has disappeared. The question, “Where is all the  
22 plastic?” continues without answer. Here, we explore one possible answer,  
23 namely that the missing plastic has been deposited, accumulated, and buried  
24 as microplastic debris in beaches, marshes, and other coastal areas all over  
25 the world.

26  
27 The southward flowing Canary Current brings plastic debris from the  
28 open North Atlantic Ocean to the coasts of the Canary Islands, mainly on  
29 the N and NE exposed beaches (Baztan et al., 2014). In the first evaluation  
30 of this phenomenon, Baztan et al. (2014), showed that the Canary Islands  
31 are highly polluted by microplastics, reaching values above 100 g per L of  
32 sand, on the most exposed areas (Fig. 1).

33  
34 At Famara beach, the citizen science project, COASTAL (Communities-  
35 Based Observatories Tackling Marine Litter), is continuing its research. This  
36 effort includes the Famara Participative Observatory project that will pro-  
37 vide long-term data on microplastic pollution in the region. In addition, it  
38 will be carrying out the important task of increasing awareness in the local  
39 population through the media social group “Agüita con el Plástico” (Baztan  
40 et al., 2015). Famara is also the beach chosen in Canary region to carry  
41 out the monitoring of microparticles on beaches (BM-6) established by the  
42 Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/CE) (CEDEX, 2016).

43  
44 In order to better understand the condition that affects the microplastic,  
45 mesoplastic and other marine debris deposition in this area, we aimed to

determine:

- 1- The micro and mesoplastic accumulation on three beaches of the Canary Islands.
- 2- The types of debris found in the samples.
- 3- The temporal and spatial variability of marine debris accumulation.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Study area

The study was conducted from September 2015 to September 2016, at three sandy beaches in the Canary Islands: Lambra (La Graciosa Island), Famara (Lanzarote Island) and Las Canteras (Gran Canaria Island) (Table 1, Fig. 2). The areas were selected because they are exposed to the predominant wind and swells (N-NE), have enough space to deposit plastic debris on the high tide line and are accessible to sampling (Figs. 2c, 2d and 2e).

Lambra is the most isolated of the three beaches, located on La Graciosa, a small-populated island located in the so-called “Chinijo archipelago”. These islands are at the northernmost of the Canary Islands, and therefore the first to encounter the plastics flowing with the Canary Current. Famara is located on Lanzarote Island. The nearest town is Caleta de Famara, with less than 1,000 inhabitants; this beach, however, receives a large number of tourists all year around. Las Canteras is an urban beach, located in a nucleus of population of more than 350,000 inhabitants. Due to the benign climate,

70 Canteras is daily used by many thousands of tourists throughout the year.

## 71 2.2. Field work

72 We have applied a slightly modified TSG-ML sampling protocol. We col-  
73 lected 3 replicates (instead 5 recommended) separated by, at least, 5 meters,  
74 on 1 cm layer (instead 5 cm) (MSFD GES Technical Subgroup on Marine  
75 Litter, 2013). The Spanish BM-6 report (CEDEX, 2016) did not report par-  
76 ticles under the first centimeter of sand in the beaches studied. This finding  
77 supports our decision to limit our sampling to the upper layer (1 cm). Sam-  
78 ples were collected, every 2 weeks, in the highest tide to avoid variability  
79 due to the tidal cycle. In a square of 50 x 50 cm (0.25 m<sup>2</sup>) along the high  
80 tide line, sediments were collected from the top 1 cm of sand to exclusively  
81 collect the marine debris deposited by the last tide. At the same time, 3  
82 L of seawater were added to each sample, mixed, and then the supernatant  
83 was filtered through a 1 mm mesh. This process was repeated three times to  
84 collect as much marine debris as possible. In Las Canteras, all sampling was  
85 done before the beach cleaning to avoid underestimation.

86

87 In the laboratory, samples were dried for 24 h at 60°C. For the samples  
88 containing remnants of vegetal debris (mainly composed of leaves, seeds,  
89 wood, seaweeds and seagrass), a density separation by ethanol (96%) was  
90 done to separate plastics and tar from organic material. Samples were dried  
91 again, sieved and separated in two sizes classes: large micro-debris (1-5 mm)  
92 and meso-debris (5-25 mm). After sieving each size class, the samples were  
93 weighted in a high precision balance (0.1 mg). The items in each sample were  
94 not counted, due to the large number of samples and the amount of particles

95 present in them. In order to compare the number of items per  $\text{m}^2$  with other  
96 studies (Table 2), a short study was performed on three samples from each  
97 site to determine the relationship between number of items/weight in debris  
98 1-5 mm. Ratios obtained in Lambra were  $69.9 \pm 16.3$  items/g; in Famara,  
99  $52.7 \pm 12.9$  items/g; and in Las Canteras,  $79.8 \pm 8.1$  items/g (Appendix A). We  
100 only used this data for comparison purposes because this relationship showed  
101 great variability between sites, and also between each sample studied.

### 102 *2.3. Environmental variables*

103 We analyzed the effect of environmental variables on monthly marine  
104 litter accumulation on each study site. The oceanographic data was provided  
105 by Puertos del Estado (Puertos del Estado, 2016) of the Government of Spain  
106 and included: significant wave height (m), wave direction in degrees (0=N,  
107 90=E), peak wave period, primary swell wave height (m) and tidal coefficient.  
108 In addition, several meteorological variables were accounted: wind speed  
109 (Km/h), maximum wind speed (Km/h), wind direction in degrees (0=N,  
110 90=E) and rain ( $\text{L}/\text{m}^2$ ), as provided by Agencia Estatal de Meteorología  
111 (AEMET, 2016) of the Government of Spain.

### 112 *2.4. Statistical analysis*

113 The data were analyzed using R statistical program (R Core Team, 2015).  
114 To confirm normality, meso and micro-debris concentration data were ana-  
115 lyzed by the Shapiro Wilk test and the homoscedasticity of the residuals  
116 was assessed graphically. Meso and micro-debris concentration data were  
117 not normal and statistical differences between areas and seasons were tested  
118 using Kruskal-Wallis test and Conover posthoc test.

### 119 3. Results

#### 120 3.1. *Micro and meso- debris accumulation*

121 Because the samples contained, not only microplastics, but also a large  
122 amount of tar, we use the terms, “micro, meso-debris and total debris”  
123 throughout the paper to include both types of contaminants.

124 A total of 261 samples were taken from September 2015 to September 2016  
125 at three locations. The average concentration of large micro-debris (1-5 mm)  
126 was 23.7 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Lambra, 16.6 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Famara, and 5.4 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Las Can-  
127 teras. The highest micro-debris concentration was 125 g/m<sup>2</sup>, 244.2 g/m<sup>2</sup> and  
128 90.7 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Lambra, Famara and Las Canteras respectively. The average  
129 meso-debris accumulation (5-25 mm) was 17.9 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Lambra, 4.8 g/m<sup>2</sup> in  
130 Famara and 4.3 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Las Canteras. Maximum values of meso-debris were  
131 157.8 g/m<sup>2</sup>, 85.1 g/m<sup>2</sup> and 69 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Lambra, Famara and Las Canteras  
132 respectively.

#### 133 3.2. *Composition*

134 We analysed the composition of 10 g of 3 representative samples (largest  
135 samples) collected at each location in order to determine the composition of  
136 debris. A representative sample of 10 g contained 524 items in Lambra, 548  
137 items in Famara and 881 items in Las Canteras. Lambra beach samples were  
138 composed of 52.7% of plastic fragments, 35.6% tar and 11.7% preproduc-  
139 tion resin pellets. Similar values were found in Famara where the samples  
140 were composed of 44.3% pellets, 43.1% fragments and 12.6% tar. However,  
141 in Las Canteras samples were composed mainly of fragments (94.3%); tar

142 and preproduction resin pellets comprised only 3.7% and 1.9%, respectively  
143 (Fig. 3).

### 144 3.3. Temporal and Spatial variability

145 Total debris (1-25 mm) accumulation along the tide line showed signif-  
146 icant differences between locations (Kruskall-Wallis test  $p < 0.001$ ) (Fig. 4).  
147 Lambra was the most polluted beach with a mean of 41.6 g/m<sup>2</sup> of total ma-  
148 rine debris at the high tide line, Famara showed a mean concentration of 21.4  
149 g/m<sup>2</sup> and Las Canteras 9.7 g/m<sup>2</sup>. The maximum values found were: 282.8  
150 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Lambra (March 2016); 304.01 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Famara (October 2015); and  
151 127.5 g/m<sup>2</sup> in Las Canteras (June 2016) (Fig. 5).

152

153 We found significant differences between seasons in Lambra and Famara;  
154 the greatest micro and meso-debris pollution was in winter and autumn  
155 in Lambra (Kruskall-Wallis test  $p < 0.01$ , Conover test  $p < 0.01$ ); and in au-  
156 tumn, winter and spring in Famara (Kruskall-Wallis test  $p < 0.01$ , Conover  
157 test  $p < 0.01$ ). In Las Canteras there were no significant differences in debris  
158 between seasons (Kruskall-Wallis test  $p > 0.01$ ), however highest values were  
159 found in summer and spring.

160

161 The Azimuth wind and wave plots of all data show a maximum marine  
162 debris concentration related to significant wave height above 1.5 m from NW  
163 and NE (Fig. 6a) and to N-NE winds (Fig. 6b). When we analyze the tem-  
164 poral changes in debris concentration and local meteorological conditions, we  
165 found, in Lambra beach, the highest values related to periods of strong winds  
166 and waves in autumn and winter (Fig. 7a). In Famara high concentrations



were related to strong waves, but not related to strong winds, predominant in summer, as shown in figure 7b. In contrast, Las Canteras did not show a correlation between the number of plastics particles and periods of strong wave and wind (Fig. 7c).

#### 4. Discussion

The plastic and tar pollution values found were very high in the three beaches studied. Lambra beach was the most affected, despite being the furthest from urban centers and the one with the smallest influx of tourists. These data and the type of marine debris found, were evidence that the pollution was not local. It came mainly from the open sea via the Canary Current. In the Lambra beach samples, 35.6% of the marine debris was tar; and in Famara, it was 12.6%. This type of waste has been reported in a Caribbean island (Debrot et al., 2013) and in a recent study from a remote island in the Maldives (Imhof et al., 2017). However, in the Canary Islands, it is surprising because the beaches of Lambra and Famara are not located near large commercial ports, as is the case of Las Canteras, in which tar pollution was not important. These tar wastes are likely to come from ships that discharge bunker oil at sea, or from old oil spills deposited on rocks and fragmented by action of waves, producing small solid tar fragments.

It is alarming, not only because both beaches are located in protected areas (UNESCO Biosphere, Natural Park and Marine Reserve), but also because they are special protection areas for birds (ZEPA), and both microplastics and small tar spheres pose a great risk for the local bird populations.

191 A study of Corys shearwaters (*Calonectris diomedea*) carried out in the Ca-  
192 nary Islands showed that 83% of birds were affected, containing, on average,  
193 8.0 plastic pieces per bird (Rodríguez et al., 2012). Plastic ingestion may  
194 cause physical damage, provoke satiation and induce starvation and general  
195 debilitation (Gregory, 2009; Ryan et al., 1988). In addition, there is a chem-  
196 ical hazard associated with microplastic ingestion, they concentrate persis-  
197 tent organic pollutants (POPs) at levels several orders of magnitude higher  
198 than those in the sea. The International Pellets Watch program analized  
199 polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), dichloro-diphenyltrichloroethane and its  
200 degradation products (DDTs), and hexachlorocyclohexanes (HCHs) in pellet  
201 samples from El Cotillo beach located in Fuerteventura, Canary Islands (Hes-  
202 kett et al., 2012). The median concentrations in the pellets (n= 5) were for  
203 PCBs (sum of 13 congeners), 9.9 ng/g-pellet; for DDTs, 4.1 ng/g-pellet; and  
204 for HCHs, 0.6 ng/g-pellet. Baztan et al. (2017) reported higher PCBs pollu-  
205 tion in pellets collected from Famara beach with values of 31.15 ng/g-pellet  
206 of total PCBs concentration. Once ingested, the POPs can be transferred to  
207 many organisms via predation (Hirai et al., 2011; Karapanagioti et al., 2011;  
208 Rios et al., 2007; Teuten et al., 2009, 2007).

209

210 A notable fact is the large number of resin preproduction pellets, mainly  
211 from samples collected in Famara (44.3%). These preproduction plastic pel-  
212 lets, also called “nurdles”, are the raw material for manufacturing plastic  
213 products. According PlasticsEurope (personal communication) there is not  
214 plastic industry (production or transformation) in the Canary Islands. The  
215 resin pellets that wash up on the islands’ beaches are transported by the

216 currents, coming from ships or industries in other parts of the planet. Stud-  
217 ies since the 1970s have reported high levels of plastic waste, mainly pellets,  
218 found at sea and along coasts (Carpenter et al., 1972; Shiber, 1987, 1982).  
219 However, the amount of preproduction resin pellets on the world’s shores is  
220 increasing and these are present even in remote areas (Ogata et al., 2009;  
221 Veerasingam et al., 2016). More research efforts are needed to determine  
222 the possible source of tar and pellets, and to determine the adsorption of  
223 persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and other chemical contaminants, and  
224 to assess subsequent potential harm to marine animals in the region.

225  
226 The highest pollution level in Lambra beach could have been due to the  
227 fact that it is the most exposed beach, the windiest, and the beach with the  
228 strongest waves, especially in autumn and winter when the greatest accumu-  
229 lation of debris occurred. The effect of wind on marine debris deposition and  
230 accumulation has been demonstrated (Browne et al., 2010). Other authors  
231 found higher levels of debris and tar contamination in the windward beaches  
232 due to strong winds and waves (Debrot et al., 1999, 2013). Famara also  
233 has high pollution values mainly in autumn and spring, however in summer  
234 there were no high values despite it being a very windy period on this beach.  
235 Las Canteras was the beach that showed smallest amount of debris. On this  
236 beach, peaks occurred in summer when high waves and high tides caused the  
237 accumulation of marine debris. The surface current is another factor that  
238 likely affected the debris deposition. Here, this variable was not measured  
239 at each location, and data from Puertos del Estado were not available. In  
240 addition, in the present work, the oceanographic data provided by Puertos

241 del Estado were estimated from models and refers to the open sea, not near-  
242 shore, local conditions. Spatial inconsistency in the seasonal patterns can be  
243 explained by the local wind fields and hydrodynamic conditions. These pro-  
244 duce different patterns in the accumulation of debris coming from the open  
245 sea, even between beaches close to each other.

246

247 There is great variability in the concentration of marine debris between  
248 the different seasons of the year, and also between sampling days. For the  
249 development of more accurate models to predict the concentration of marine  
250 debris, or for the determination of the long-term trends, it is necessary to  
251 measure the current direction and velocity, the wave direction and height in  
252 situ, and to increase the sampling frequency. This requires arduous sampling  
253 work. Citizen science could help with the sample collection for long-time  
254 studies, and at the same time generate awareness and promote environmen-  
255 tal education (Hidalgo-Ruz and Thiel, 2013; Baztan et al., 2015). In addition,  
256 improvement in quantitative methods, including meteorological and oceano-  
257 graphical measurements, as well as the use of standard methods and units,  
258 are necessary to facilitate comparison and evaluation of long-term, global  
259 scale, trends in marine-litter accumulation. Quantifying microplastics is cur-  
260 rently accomplished by microscopy and by separating each particle manually,  
261 while in other fields such as medicine and oceanography measurement is ac-  
262 complished by high resolution image analysis with the aid of well developed  
263 software. Research in the field of image analysis is needed to measure plastic  
264 particles automatically in order to maximize human and material resources.

265

266 The beach chosen to monitor microparticles (BM-6) in the Canary Island  
267 area was Famara beach (CEDEX, 2016). Samples were collected on the 21<sup>st</sup>  
268 November 2016. The mean was 10.86 g/m<sup>2</sup>, lower than our average value for  
269 all data from Famara beach (16.6 g/m<sup>2</sup>), and lower than our average value  
270 found on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015 (18.17±7.3 g/m<sup>2</sup>) (Table 2). However,  
271 the maximum values obtained for the present study in Famara and Lambra  
272 beaches are slightly lower than those presented by Baztan et al. (2014).

273

274 The BM-6 report (CEDEX, 2016) and Baztan et al. (2014) did not men-  
275 tion tar pollution in describing their samples. Perhaps, this was because tar  
276 is not included as a category of marine litter or marine debris. However, it is  
277 an important source of marine pollution in the Canary Islands, and is likely  
278 to be important in other regions. By definition tar should be included be-  
279 cause it is a ‘persistent, manufactured or processed solid material discarded,  
280 disposed of or abandoned in the marine and coastal environment’ (Galgani  
281 et al., 2010; Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, 2011; GESAMP, 2015;  
282 NOAA Marine Debris Program, 2017).

283

284 The comparison with studies carried out in other parts of the world is  
285 difficult due to the different objectives, size categorizations and the different  
286 methodologies and units used, as reflected in the review by Browne et al.  
287 (2015). In the present study the number of particles was not counted, be-  
288 cause the time invested in the processing of 261 samples would have been  
289 too large. However, the most convenient units to express the concentration  
290 in order to be comparable with other studies is n°particles/m<sup>2</sup>. In addition,

291 it is advisable to report the volume of sand collected, because not all studies  
292 are based on samples collected from the same depth. Furthermore, volume  
293 is more comparable than mass because sand has different densities. The  
294 BM-6 report showed that 88.7% of microplastics are in the 1-5 mm fraction  
295 size (CEDEX, 2016). From these data, and average values of mass and n° of  
296 items ( $10.864 \text{ g/m}^2$  or  $541.66 \text{ particles/m}^2$ ) we calculate an average number  
297 of particles of 1-5 mm per gram in 44 items (CEDEX, 2016). This value is  
298 in the range obtained in the present study for Famara ( $52.7 \pm 12.9 \text{ items/g}$ ),  
299 but this estimation has a high deviation (Appendix A). We use it only for  
300 comparison purposes. The ratios obtained for Lambra ( $69.9 \pm 16.3 \text{ items/g}$ )  
301 and Las Canteras ( $79.8 \pm 8.1 \text{ items/g}$ ) also showed high variability (Appendix  
302 A).

303  
304 Values obtained in other regions of the world showed that accumulation  
305 of marine debris in the Canary Islands is higher than in most of the other  
306 zones, except Hong Kong (Fok and Cheung, 2015), South Korea (Lee et al.,  
307 2013) and China (Qiu et al., 2015) (Table 2). This indicates that the Canary  
308 Archipelago is a hot spot of marine litter, as previously showed by Baztan  
309 et al. (2014) and the BM-6 report (CEDEX, 2016).

## 310 5. Conclusions

311 1- Spatial inconsistency in the seasonal patterns of coastal pollution was  
312 found. Debris accumulation depended mainly of coastline orientation and  
313 local-wind and wave conditions.

314 2- The strong presence of resin pellets and tar pollution are evidence that

315 contamination is not land-produced. Further research is necessary to deter-  
316 mine their origin.

317 3- Due the large amount of tar present in the samples, and its negative  
318 impact on ecosystems and marine biota, we suggest including tar as a cat-  
319 egory of marine litter or marine debris in order to report it in monitoring  
320 programs established by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD  
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## 578 7. Figures and Tables



Figure 1: Microplastic pollution in the Canary Islands. (a) Marine plastic debris along the high tide line in Famara beach, Lanzarote. (b) Detailed view of marine plastic debris.

Table 1: Summary of geographical and sedimentary conditions at each beach. Data from Alonso Bilbao (1993) and Mangas et al. (2008).

|                           | <b>Lambra beach</b>         | <b>Famara beach</b>                        | <b>Las Canteras beach</b>                |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Location                  | 29°16.763'N<br>13°29.736'W  | 29°6.917'N<br>13°33.504'W                  | 28°7.854'N<br>15°26.775'W                |
| Total longitud (m)        | 600                         | 6000                                       | 2949                                     |
| Turistic pressure         | Low                         | Medium                                     | High                                     |
| Beach cleaning            | Once a month<br>macrolitter | Once a month<br>macrolitter                | Twice a day<br>macro and microlitter     |
| Orientation               | N-NE                        | N  | N  |
| Exposure                  | Open to NE                  | Open to N-NW,<br>partially protected to NE | Open to NW,<br>partially protected to NE |
| Intertidal zone (m)       | 20                          | 100  | 60                                       |
| Sediment type             | Medium sands                | Fine sands                                 | Fine sands                               |
| Median sediment size (mm) | 0.433                       | 0.228                                      | 0.125                                    |

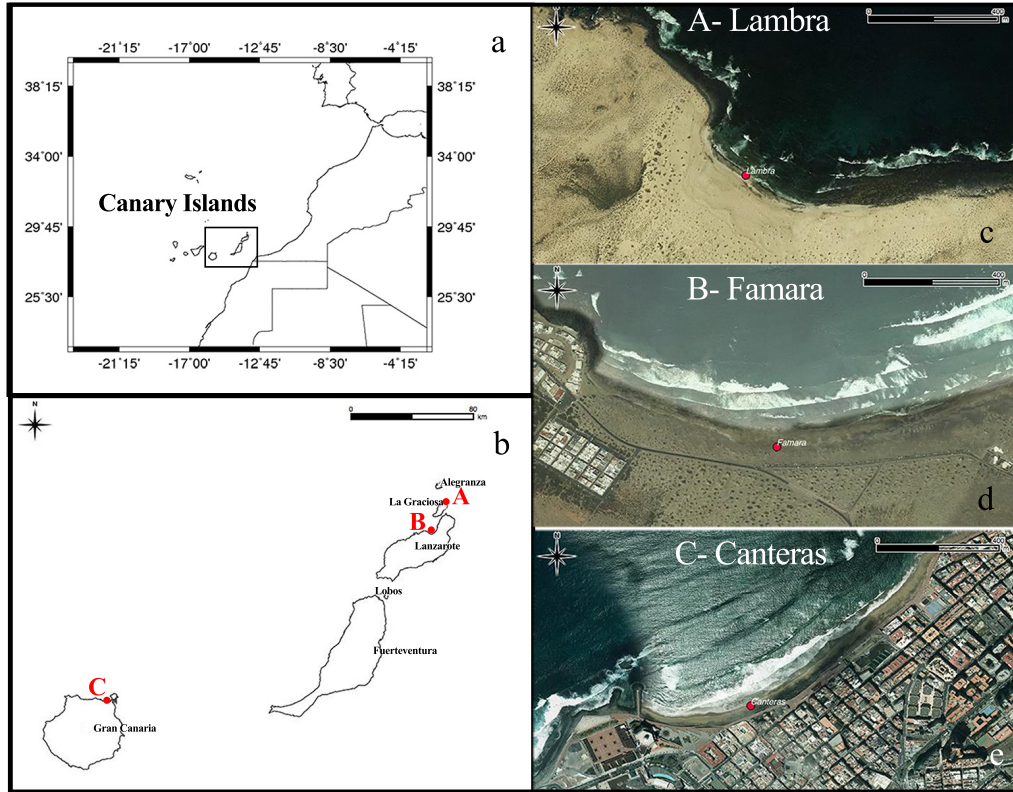


Figure 2: Study area. (a) Location of Canary Islands. (b) Sampling sites. (c) Satellite image of Playa Lambra (location A), La Graciosa Island. (d) Satellite image of Famara beach (location B), Lanzarote Island. (e) Satellite image of Las Canteras (location C), Gran Canaria Island.

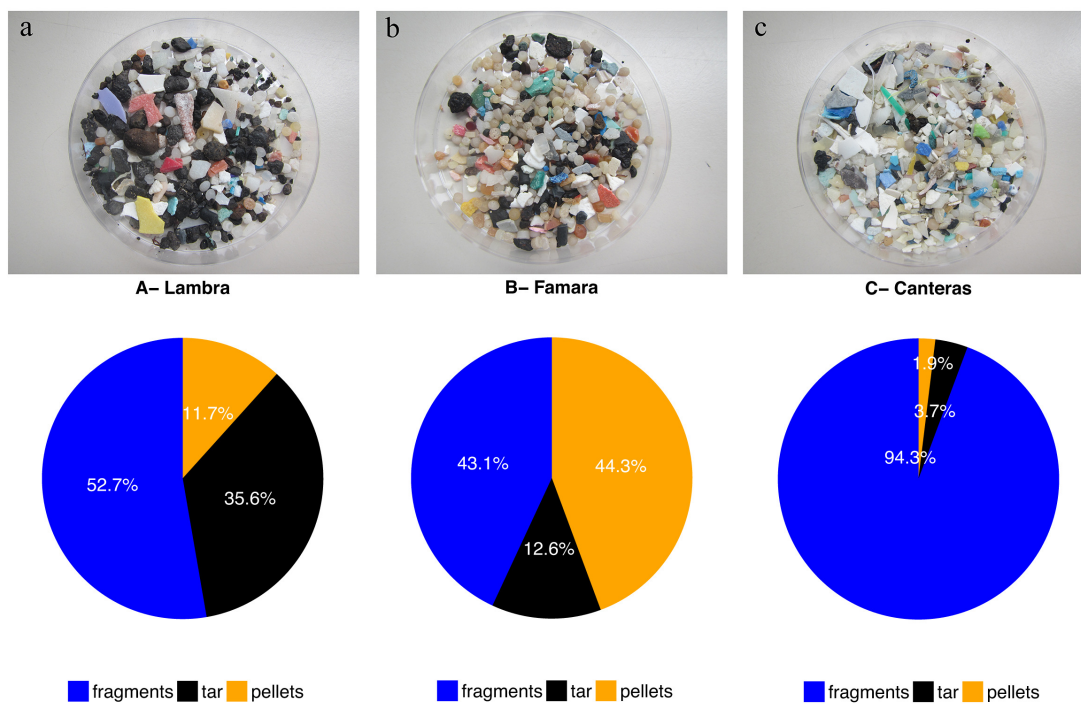


Figure 3: Composition of marine debris. (a) Lambra beach 52.7% plastic fragments, 35.6% tar and 11.7% preproduction pellets. (b) Famara beach 44.3% preproduction pellets, 43.1% plastic fragments and 12.6% tar. (c) Las Canteras beach 94.3% fragments, 3.7% tar and 1.9% preproduction pellets.

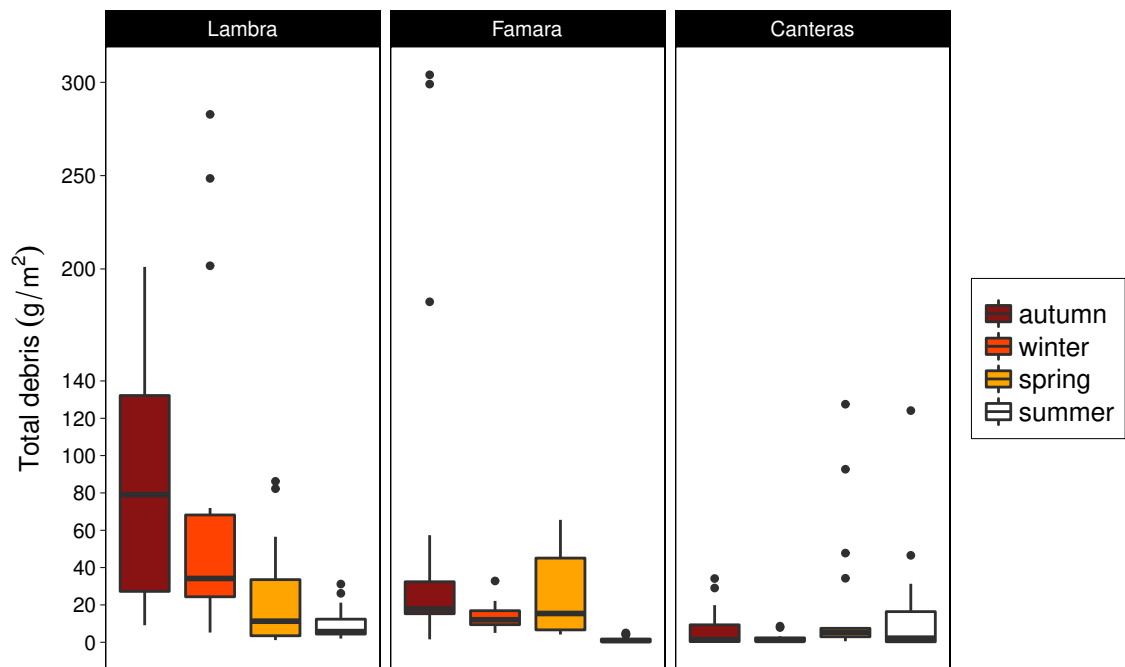
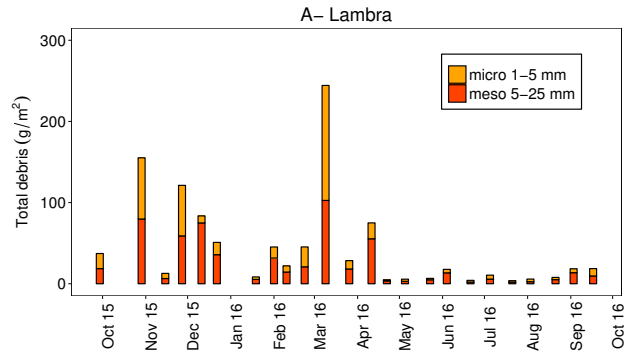
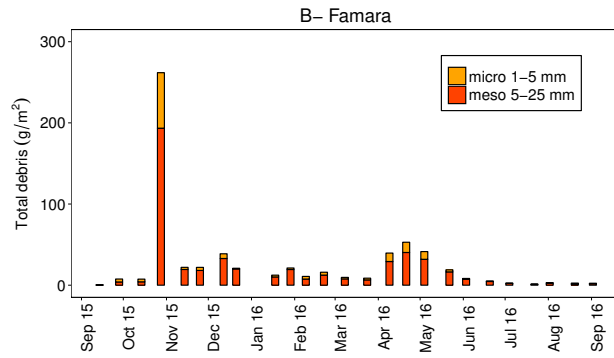


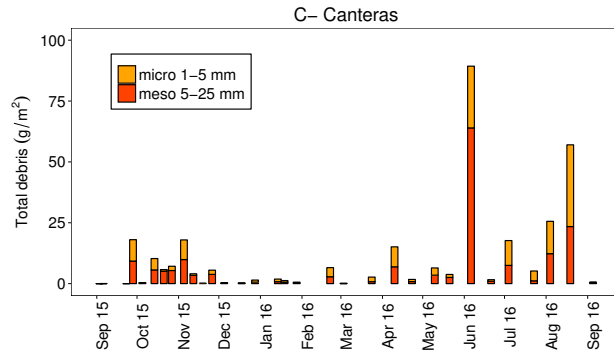
Figure 4: Marine debris in  $\text{g/m}^2$  by location and season. The central thick line of each box designates the median, the box height shows the interquartile range, and the whiskers indicate the lowest and the highest values.



(a)

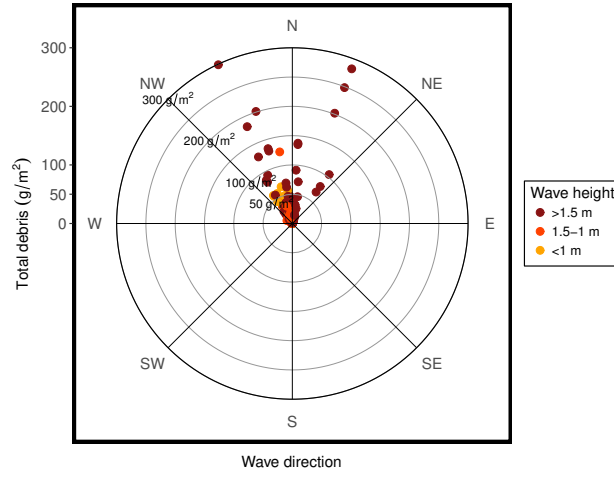


(b)

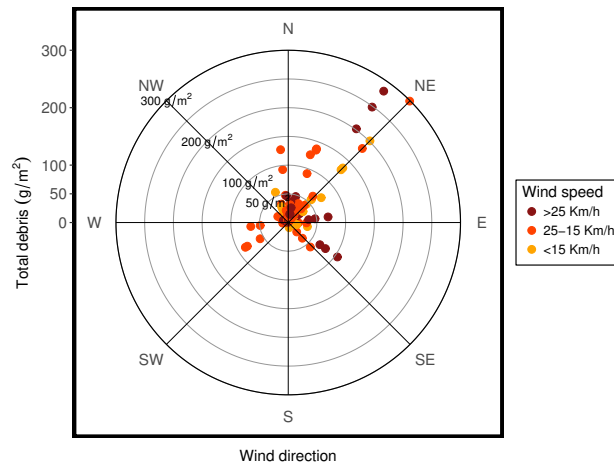


(c)

Figure 5: Mean abundance in  $\text{g/m}^2$  of micro (1-5 mm) and meso-debris (5-25 mm) collected from September 2015 to September 2016. (a) Lambra beach. (b) Famara beach. (c) Las Canteras beach.



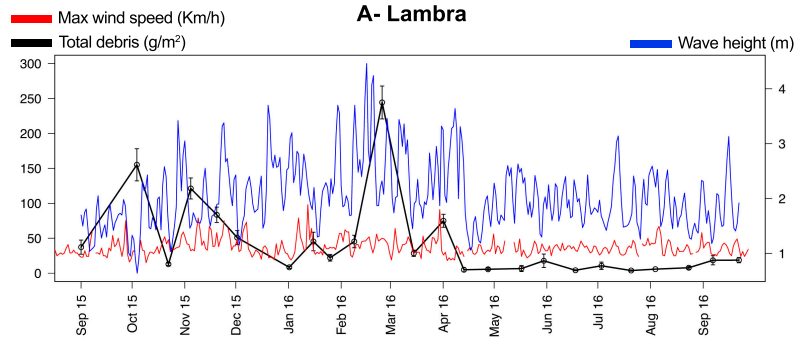
(a) Azimuth Wave



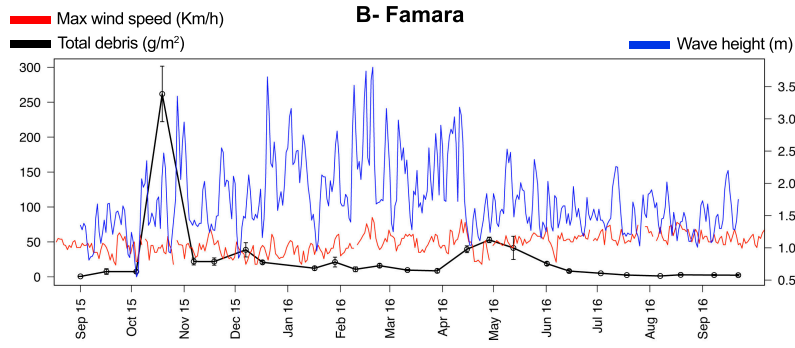
(b) Azimuth Wind

Figure 6: Azimuth plots. (a) Wave height (m) and direction, and marine debris concentration of all samples collected. (b) Wind speed (mean in Km/h) and direction, and marine debris concentration of all samples collected.

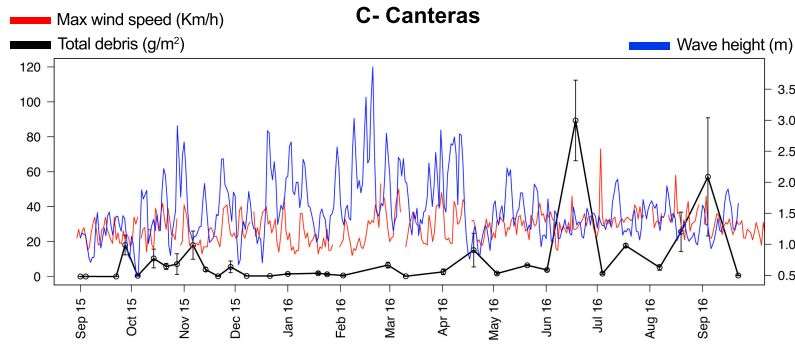




(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 7: Temporal variability of marine debris in g/m<sup>2</sup> (left axis, black line), maximum wind speed in Km/h (left axis, red line) and wave height in meters (right axis, blue line).

Table 2: Review of microplastic abundance in sediments from different regions. \*Samples include tar and microplastics. \*\*Values estimated from mean weight of particles (Appendix A).

| Area                          | Size (mm) |         | g/m <sup>2</sup> | Items/m <sup>2</sup> | References                        |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Lambra, Canary Islands*       | 1-5       | mean    | 23.7             | 1,656**              | Present work                      |
|                               | 1-5       | min-max | 0.77-125         | 53.4-8,737**         |                                   |
| Famara, Canary Islands*       | 1-5       | mean    | 16.6             | 874.8**              | Present work                      |
|                               | 1-5       | min-max | 0-244.2          | 0-12,869**           |                                   |
| Las Canteras, Canary Islands* | 1-5       | mean    | 5.4              | 430.9**              | Present work                      |
|                               | 1-5       | min-max | 0-90.8           | 0-7,245**            |                                   |
| Famara, Canary Islands        | 1-5       | mean    | 10.86            | 541.66               | CEDEX (2016)                      |
| Hong Kong                     | 0.315-5   | mean    | 5.6              | 5,595                | Fok and Cheung (2015)             |
|                               | 0.315-5   | min-max | 0.008-249.16     | 16-258,408           |                                   |
| Uruguay                       | >0.3      | mean    | 0.0032           |                      | Lozoya et al. (2016)              |
| SE Pacific beaches, Chile     | 1-4.75    | min-max |                  | <1-805               | Hidalgo-Ruz and Thiel (2013)      |
|                               | 1-4.75    | mean    |                  | 27                   |                                   |
| North coast Taiwan            |           | min-max |                  | 16-1,936             | Kunz et al. (2016)                |
| South Korea                   | 1-5       | min-max |                  | 1.6-92,217           | Lee et al. (2013)                 |
| Mid-west Korea                | 1-5       | mean    |                  | 46.7-1,247           | Kim et al. (2015)                 |
| Portuguese coast              | 1-10      | mean    |                  | 28.6-392.8           | Martins and Sobral (2011)         |
| Hawaiian archipelago          | 1-15      | mean    |                  | 1.2                  | McDermid and McMullen (2004)      |
| Caribbean islands             | 1-5       | min-max |                  | 0.2-2,500            | Schmuck et al. (2017)             |
| North Gulf of Mexico, USA     | 0.5-5     | mean    |                  | 13.2-50.6            | Wessel et al. (2016)              |
| Southeast Brazil              |           | min-max |                  | 2-1,300              | Gomes De Carvalho and Neto (2016) |
| Persian Gulf, Iran            | 0.45-4.75 | min-max |                  | 2-1,258              | Naji et al. (2017)                |
| Russian Baltic coast          | 0.5-5     | min-max |                  | 7-5,560              | Esiukova (2017)                   |
| Slovenia                      | 0.25-5    | mean    |                  | 178.8                | Laglbauer et al. (2014)           |
| Maldives Islands              | 1-5       | mean    |                  | 22.6                 | Imhof et al. (2017)               |
|                               | >5        | mean    |                  | 13.2                 |                                   |
| <b>g/L</b>                    |           |         |                  |                      |                                   |
| Famara, Canary Islands        | 1-5       | min-max |                  | 0-109                | Baztan et al. (2014)              |
| <b>Items/L</b>                |           |         |                  |                      |                                   |
| China, Bohai Sea              | 0.1-10    | mean    |                  | 102.9-163.3          | Yu et al. (2016)                  |
| <b>Items/Kg</b>               |           |         |                  |                      |                                   |
| German Baltic coast           | 0.1-1     | min-max |                  | 1-7                  | Stolte et al. (2015)              |
| Belgium                       | 0.038-1   | min-max |                  | 48.7-156.2           | Claessens et al. (2011)           |
| Singapore                     |           | min-max |                  | 0-16                 | Ng and Obbard (2006)              |
| Italy, Tyrrhenian Sea         |           | mean    |                  | 151-678.7            | Fastelli et al. (2016)            |
| China                         | <1-1.5    | min-max |                  | 4,320-12,160         | Qiu et al. (2015)                 |

579 **Appendix A. Supplementary data**

Table A.3: Relationship between number of particles/weight in total debris, microplastics (MPs) and tar (1-5 mm). \*Samples include tar and microplastics.

| Location | Debris*<br>weight (g) | Debris*<br>items (n°) | Debris*<br>n°/g | mean * | St Dev | MPs<br>weight (g) | MPs<br>items (n°) | MPs<br>n°/g | Tar<br>weight (g) | Tar<br>items (n°) | Tar<br>n°/g |
|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------|--------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Lambra   | 5.28                  | 378                   | 71.53           | 69.94  | 16.26  | 2.98              | 226               | 75.89       | 2.30              | 152               | 66.00       |
| Lambra   | 3.78                  | 200                   | 52.94           |        |        | 1.87              | 106               | 56.68       | 1.90              | 94                | 49.35       |
| Lambra   | 4.54                  | 387                   | 85.34           |        |        | 2.92              | 234               | 80.19       | 1.60              | 153               | 95.42       |
| Famara   | 2.03                  | 77                    | 37.88           | 52.74  | 12.89  | 1.57              | 63                | 40.02       | 0.46              | 14                | 30.53       |
| Famara   | 3.84                  | 228                   | 59.33           |        |        | 3.26              | 201               | 61.75       | 0.59              | 27                | 45.90       |
| Famara   | 4.46                  | 272                   | 61.00           |        |        | 3.81              | 236               | 61.94       | 0.65              | 36                | 55.27       |
| Canteras | 4.41                  | 393                   | 89.12           | 79.78  | 8.10   | 4.32              | 383               | 88.63       | 0.09              | 10                | 113.90      |
| Canteras | 2.63                  | 199                   | 75.63           |        |        | 2.45              | 184               | 75.16       | 0.18              | 15                | 84.89       |
| Canteras | 4.05                  | 302                   | 74.60           |        |        | 4.00              | 296               | 74.01       | 0.06              | 6                 | 108.70      |