

# Manta Rays



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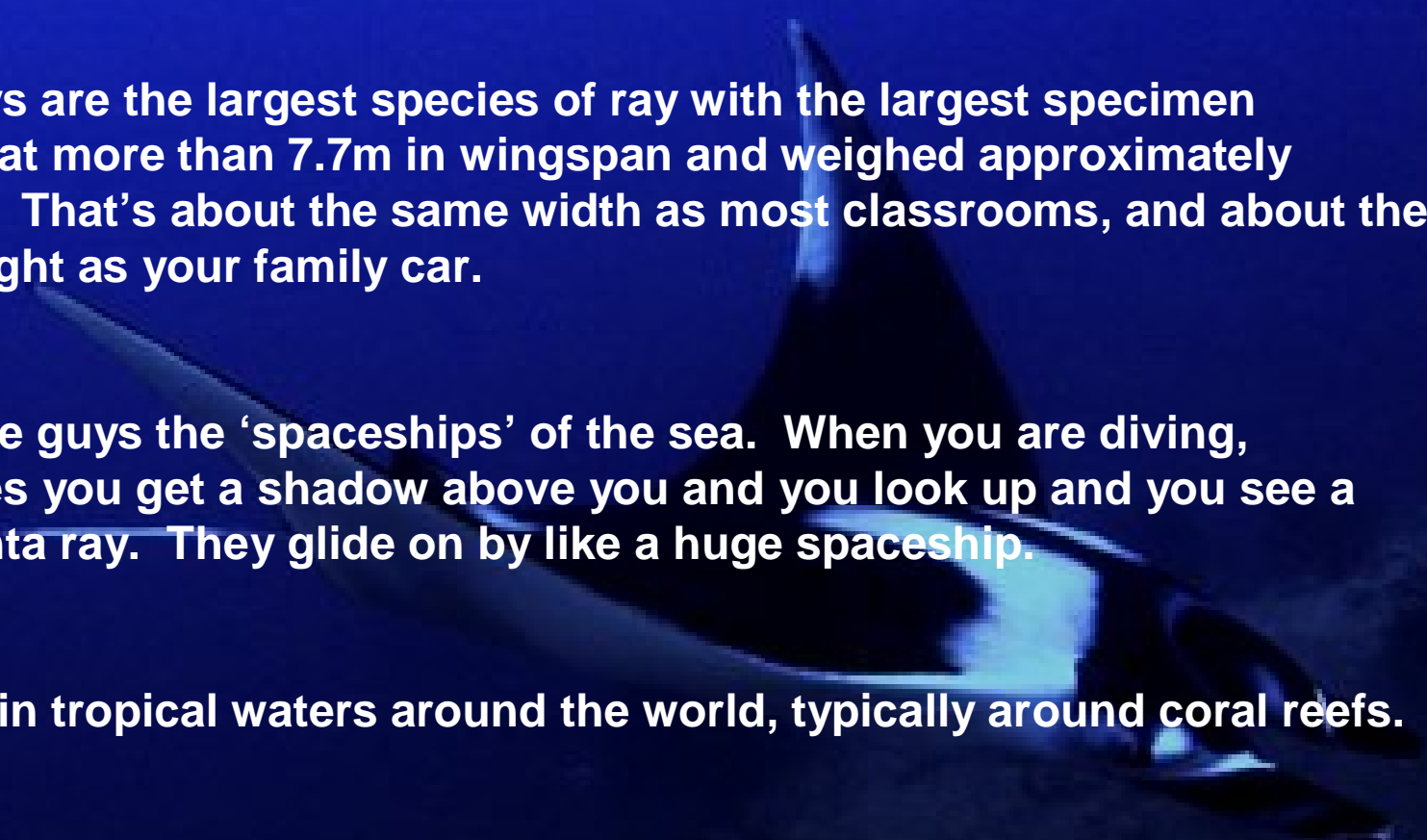
# Manta Rays

Manta rays are the largest species of ray with the largest specimen recorded at more than 7.7m in wingspan and weighed approximately 1,300kgs. That's about the same width as most classrooms, and about the same weight as your family car.

I call these guys the 'spaceships' of the sea. When you are diving, sometimes you get a shadow above you and you look up and you see a giant manta ray. They glide on by like a huge spaceship.

They live in tropical waters around the world, typically around coral reefs.

They are considered to be 'near threatened' which means they are vulnerable and we need to keep assessing their numbers.



# Feeding

The curious thing about the Manta Ray is that it is a 'filter feeder' like Baleen Whales. It is the only ray to do this.

But many years ago it was a bottom feeder and over the years it has adapted to the open ocean. Their teeth have all but gone with only one band left on the lower jaw.

Now they feed by opening their mouths and filtering the water through their gills. They feed on Plankton and fish larvae and this system allows them to grow much larger than other rays.





# Adapting through the years

As mentioned, the Manta ray has adapted over time to a new way of life. Apart from their feeding habits their skin has also changed.

They used to have dermal denticles similar to a shark however they now have a much thicker slimy skin known as mucus.

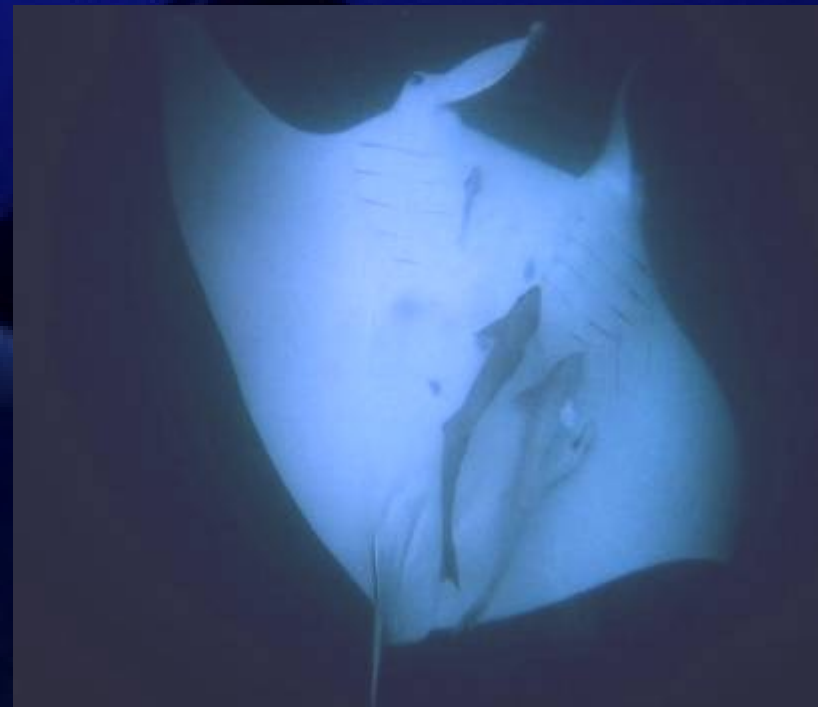
They used to have a barb on their tail like normal sting rays, however it too has gone and it means they are totally harmless to Humans.



# Behaviour

Manta rays often visit 'cleaning stations' where small fish such as wrasse, remora and angelfish swim in the manta's gills and over its skin to feed, in the process cleaning it of parasites and dead tissue.

Here you can see several remora cleaning the underside of the manta ray.



# Behaviour

Another behaviour of the manta ray is to jump out of the water. No one knows why they do this but maybe it is when their main predator is chasing them. That predator is the shark.



# Behaviour

Around the Great Barrier Reef region, it is rare to see manta rays in large numbers. You may see one or two.

However on the west coast near Ningaloo Reef in Exmouth, they are often seen in trains. It is almost like they hang onto the tail of the one in front.

A very good friend of mine once went swimming with a train of no less than 28





# Breeding

The breeding behaviour of manta rays is similar to other closely related rays. They mate near the surface, no deeper than a meter, and it all begins with the male chasing the female for around 30 minutes.

The male then bites into the pectoral fin (wings) to stay with the female while they mate.

The babies are wrapped in a thin shell that actually hatches inside the mother before coming out into the ocean. When they do come out they are almost see through.





# Threats

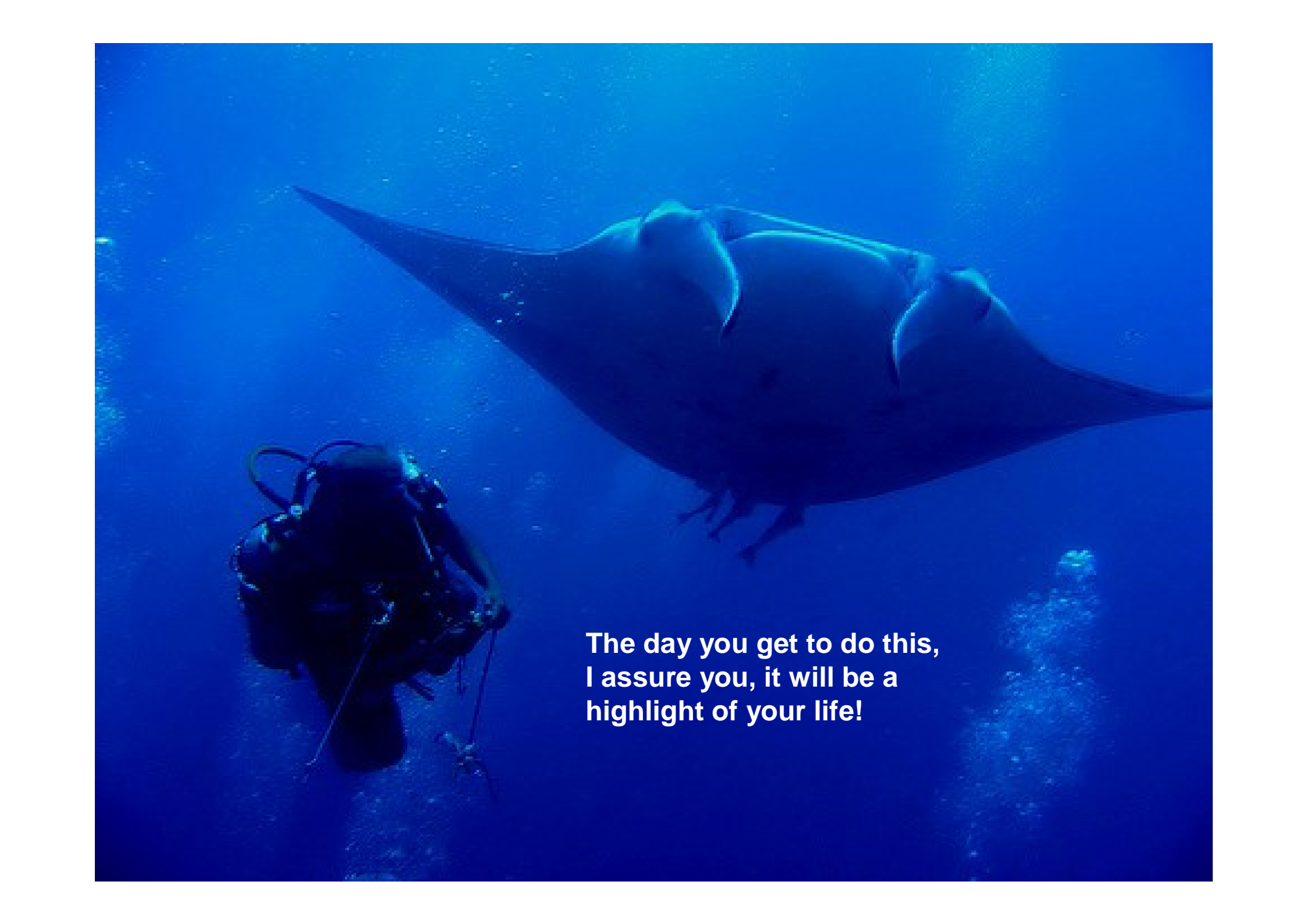
The Manta Ray is not under serious threat at present. However not much research has been done into manta rays.

The biggest threat is from disturbing their environment. Poor water quality due to run off from land is one issue we can do something about by not using pesticides and bleaches that get flushed down drains.

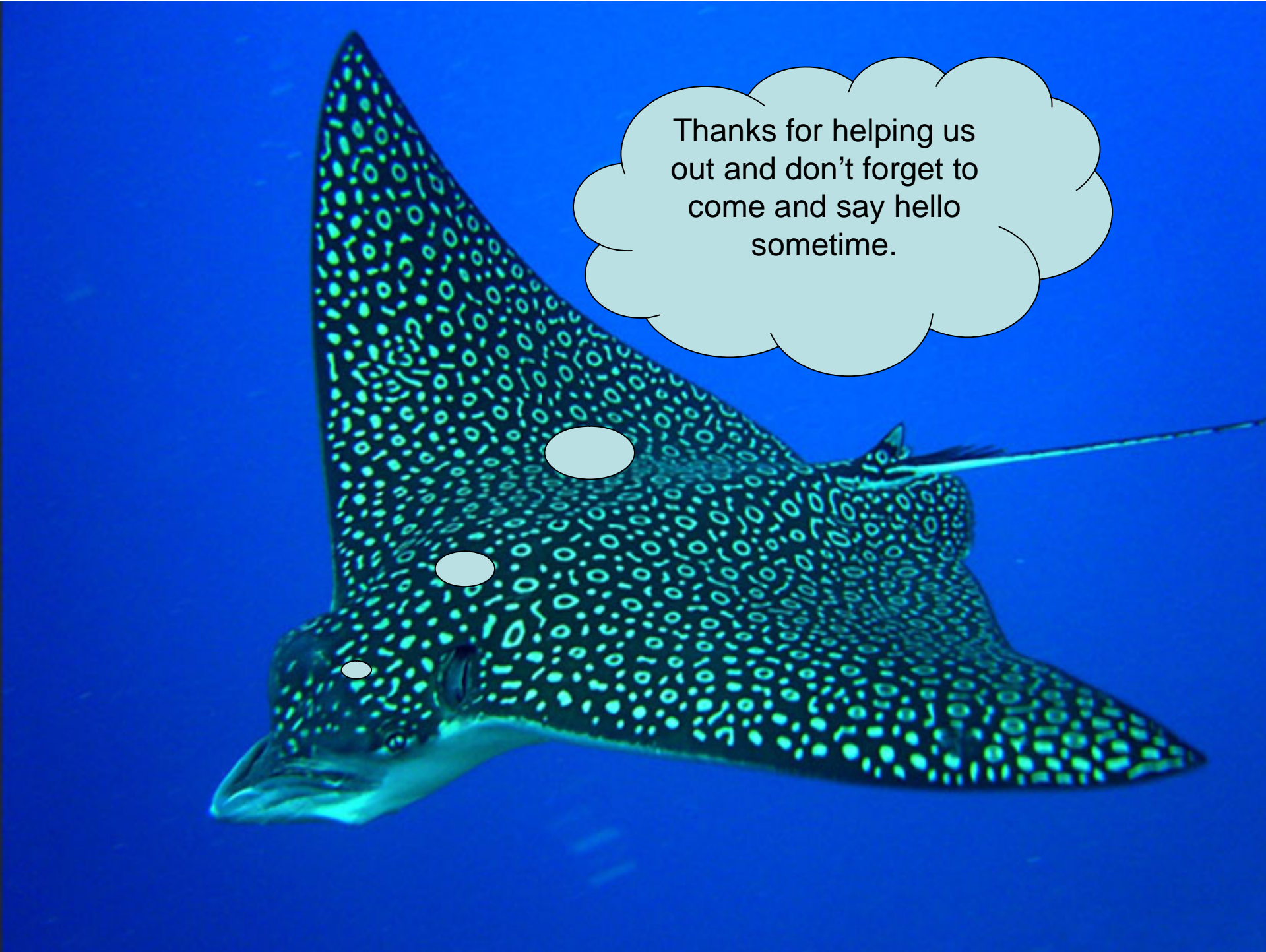
Plastic bags are another issue as they are filter feeders however these creatures can expel the bags if they need to so it is not common to find any manta rays dying because of plastic bags.

So the main thing we can do is to ensure we look after our oceans by keeping plastic and toxins out of the waterways.

At home, ask your parents if they can use environmentally friendly products when washing your clothes and dishes.

A full-page underwater photograph with a deep blue color cast. A scuba diver is positioned in the lower-left quadrant, facing away from the camera and swimming towards a large manta ray. The manta ray is oriented horizontally, its head pointing towards the left. The diver's equipment, including a tank and fins, is visible. Bubbles from the diver's breathing apparatus are visible in the lower-right area. The overall scene is serene and captures a rare moment of interaction between a human and a large marine animal.

**The day you get to do this,  
I assure you, it will be a  
highlight of your life!**

A large, spotted stingray is shown swimming in clear blue water. The stingray's body is covered in a pattern of white spots and lines on a dark background. It has a long, thin tail that extends to the right. A large, light blue speech bubble with a black outline is positioned above the stingray's head. The speech bubble contains the text: "Thanks for helping us out and don't forget to come and say hello sometime." There are three small white circles on the stingray's body, one near its eye and two further back on its wing.

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