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TITLE: Ecological effects of sewage discharge in the marine environment

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ABSTRACT:

Man has always been faced with the problem of getting rid of the waste he produces. Our palaeolithic and neolithic ancestors who subsisted on oysters and other shellfish in small coastal settlements simply threw the waste shells out of their back doors to form kitchen middens which are now of great interest to the archaeologist. In medieval times sewage and domestic waste was thrown into the streets where it flowed along open channels. Rats were plentiful and provided food for predatory birds such as the kite which were then common. In the nineteenth century, the system of sewers and water carriage evolved which did not produce many problems while the populations served remained scattered or reasonably small, but which gave rise to pollution of rivers and streams as the size of towns grew. The problems produced were mainly inland and terrestrial however; little the marine environment was affected apart from estuaries within the boundaries or close to large cities such as London. The problem in inland waters became so serious however that a series of Royal Commissions was set up in the nineteenth century to report on methods of sewage treatment. The last of these Commissions, that on Sewage Disposal which reported during the first fifteen years of this century, may be said to have initiated modern attitudes to pollution control in inland waters.

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