“Pssst! Kristy!”
Loud, insistent whispers wake me up. I’m buried in a sleeping bag, cozy in my gently rocking bunk. Deep in the belly of the Velocity, the 56-foot cray-fishing surf charter boat that I, along with seven others, currently call home. All is dark and quiet…

“Kristy! Kristy!”
Except for that adamant voice. The voice that belongs to the Tasmanian who has begun pulling at my ankle because it’s time to check the surf, and he wants a wave before we start work. So do I. Eyes open; I’m awake. I climb up on to a damp and frigid deck chilled by Tasmanian sea air. Nature’s cinema floored me last night with its rolling silhouettes of mountains under clear skies, dripping with stars and moonlight. Daylight reveals last night’s anchorage at the serene New Harbour/Beer Can Bay.

I swap my thermals for 4/3 wettie, hot vest, booties and hood. Skipper Dave Wyatt is preparing the dinghy with fellow Tasmanians Matt and Jimmy Dell. I’m keenly over the rail and into the dinghy.

We push away from the Velocity and motor through quartzite features nearby, land steep and thick with impenetrable scrub and rainforest and cool, steel grey waters, dark and deep.

What am I doing out here on a boat in remote Tasmania checking the surf before work? Because, as well as checking the surf, we are scouting the beach and its accessibility for the dinghy. I’m one of 12 volunteers on this year’s Surfrider Tassie Marine Debris cleanup, a trip that ventures to the South West Coast wilderness and World Heritage Areas to collect marine debris. Such debris - the remains of rubbish disposed of in the ocean that washes onto the shore - is responsible for the death of marine life, which can often mistake the rubbish for prey. Small pieces, such as plastic, cigarette butts and loose fishing tackle are eaten by marine mammals and birds, lodging in their stomachs and throats and causing them to starve to death. Larger objects, such as loose fishing nets and ropes can also get caught around the flippers, fins and necks of larger marine mammals, causing choking and death.

Spain Bay
Where we anchor the boat and begin cleaning depends on the weather, which, in this part of the world, can be extremely heavy. It rains on average 250 days per year, the highest recorded wind speed is 170 km/h and water usually below 10 degrees when you get up in the morning. Hardcore.

Today, it’s overcast, with light rain and 15-25 knot winds tending west-south-west. We have a serenely small swell building. Best location for us in these conditions is Spain Bay, about eight hours steaming from South Cape.

Dave Wyatt is a pro cray-fisherman, surfer and has 20 years experience of the Tasmanian coastlines. He knows these oceans - the remote surf spots, the safe anchorages and big waves - like no-one on the planet. The dinghy is like an extension of his body, and he safely delivers us through rocks and chunky swells to the white sands of this remote, isolated beach.

On the beach, we grab a rubbish bag and start walking, looking for debris. There are 12 of us, all Tasmanians except for the two ring-ins from the surf industry. We all have one thing in common: the ocean. There’s a marine campaigner, an environmental scientist, a cartographer, fishermen, marine scientist, marine educator, and environmental fundraiser, an artist and an architect. In our storm-proof jackets and gumboots, we scour the beaches, surrounding shrubbery and sea caves through squalls of rain, wind and occasional sunny patches.
The posse at the front score easy-to-see and large items like fuel drums, long ropes, bottles and buoys or chunks of polystyrene. The largest item we found was a 10-gill net, some inside the remote section of the Inlet. The most horrific item we found were the 10-gill nets, some inside the World Heritage area. It’s a fine filament net, about 20 to 50 metres long and two-rutten deep. It takes all species and sizes of marine life in its path — fish, birds, sharks, everything. If the net is lost and its anchoring, it continues to drift around catching marine life, until (if) they wash up. Matt was telling me that Tassie is the only state where the recreational use of gill net is legal.

**Home**

I return home to any city humbled by the South West. It’s a place with no boundaries of time or space, a place where each individual is equal with the earth, and therefore at the mercy of its waters, its vegetation, its inhabitants, its diverse, uncrowded weather, its undisturbed sense, and all of its natural elements. Yes, I came home a total hippy. And to be honest, I also came home a little cranky. Cranky that even in the most far away, wild areas, humankind has still managed to leave their shit behind. But I’m ok with that; we’re just giving it back.

**Chew-and-Spew and Hannants Inlet**

Everyone has that sea legs now, except for me. It’s the worst when we are resting, especially today as we make our way south. South West Cape in the early 1980s, the South West Cape was a popular place to get shipwrecked, owing to reef strike or rock walls or giant storms. The large island tended to spin around us and cause the boat to rock and roll. With the smell of island wafting around the deck, it’s an adventure on the senses for the uninitiated. An indicator: I’m about 15–20 away from puking my guts up. The Tasmanian Detox/Core Body Strengthening/Chew-and-Spew and Hannants Inlet. Before dinner, we throw a blue tarp on the rear of the dinghy in the surf zone, coping with sea-sickness in massive swells, quick-flips when you’re a helicopter flight from help, and about capturing a feral cat, eating a dead one and everything in between. I was shown how to negotiate reef bottom point breaks, deep sand bottom channels and giant blankets of dandy bull kelp trying to take you under. Others explained the intricacies of an octopode neurological system, an Albatross’s flight path and the prehistoric foot waves rolling in. Other girl surfers on this trip, we all giggle…

**Tasmanian**

This beach is trash poetry today, with curling, 35 to 20-foot swells. We are having a rest and recuperation day, tucked up high inside Port Davey. We spend the day surfing rock-bottom points, water thick and dull brown with bull kelp, eating and enjoying boat life. Ocean banana fills the deck. These Tassie folk are very impressive.

**Peopling a Bottle**

We found a Letter in a Bottle, or, as Matt called it, ‘Polluter in a Bottle’. What losers put this stuff in the ocean? Tragic romantics, I guess. Letter guy left his name, number and home address — maybe I’ll give him a call and tell him to grow a brain.