

Heal the Bay

1444 9th Street
Santa Monica CA 90401

ph 310 451 1550
fax 310 496 1902

info@healthebay.org
www.healthebay.org

June 2, 2008

Lindy Coe-Juell
Assistant to the City Manager
City of Manhattan Beach
1400 Highland Avenue
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266

RE: Consideration of an Ordinance to Prohibit the Use of Plastic Carry-Out Bags in Manhattan Beach

Dear Ms. Coe-Juell:

On behalf of Heal the Bay and our over 12,000 members, we support your proposal to ban the free distribution of single use plastic (including biodegradable plastic) carryout bags at all stores within Manhattan Beach. Heal the Bay applauds the City of Manhattan Beach for taking leadership to curb the proliferation of single use plastic bags in your community. We further encourage you to include a provision in your proposal that would require retailers to charge a fee on single use paper bags and include penalties for noncompliance with the proposed ordinance.

Plastic carryout bags are wreaking havoc in our inland and beach communities. An estimated 6 billion plastic bags are used each year in Los Angeles County. Because these bags are only designed for single-use and have a very low recycling rate (1-5%)¹ the majority of these bags are either landfilled or end up as litter in our watersheds and beaches. During the 2006 California Coastal Cleanup Day volunteers collected over 120,000 plastic bags.² Plastic bags have become so ubiquitous that public agencies in Los Angeles County collectively spend \$18 million annually to clean up plastic bag litter.³

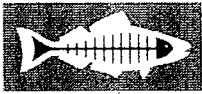
Furthermore, plastic bags severely threaten wildlife and degrade the environment. For months after a storm, streamside vegetation, in-stream habitats and creek bottoms are littered with seemingly endless piles of plastic shopping bags. Streams and storm drains carry plastic bags to the ocean where they are frequently mistaken as food and ingested by marine life. Over 267 species worldwide have been impacted by plastic litter such as plastic bags.⁴ The world's largest ocean garbage dump in the North Pacific is currently estimated to be over twice the size of Texas, where densities of bits of plastic trash have tripled during the last decade. It is estimated

¹ US EPA 2005 Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste, Table 4.

² Ocean Conservancy, 2006 International Coastal Cleanup Day Report.

³ County of Los Angeles (August 2007). "An Overview of Plastic Carryout Bags in Los Angeles County: A Staff Report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors."

⁴ N. Wallace. "Debris entanglement in the marine environment: A review" (985) pp. 259-277 in: R.S. Shomura and H.O. Yoshida (eds.), Proceedings of the Workshop on the Fate and Impact of Marine Debris, U.S. Department of Commerce. NOAA Technical Memorandum. NMFS. NOAA-TM-NMFS-SWFC-5.



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that 80% of marine debris comes from land-based sources, the majority of which is comprised of plastic materials.⁵

Heal the Bay supports the inclusion of biodegradable plastic bags in the City's proposed ordinance. Plastics claiming to be "biodegradable" or "compostable" have not proven to degrade in the marine environment and may pose serious threats to marine life.⁶ Instead, they require high heat and bacteria, such as those present in industrial composting facilities, to break down into constituents that assimilate back into the environment.

We also recommend that the City include a fee on paper carryout bags in its ordinance, consistent with the City of Santa Monica staff recommendation for action on single-use carryout bags. State law does not currently preclude cities from imposing fees on paper bags, only plastic bags. As the most ubiquitous alternative to plastic, paper bags are themselves fraught with environmental impacts. The production of paper bags contributes to natural resource depletion, greenhouse gas emissions and additional waterborne wastes from the pulping and paper making process.⁷ A paper bag fee is critical in driving the use of the most sustainable option, reusable bags, rather than shifting consumer use from plastic to paper carryout bags.

Finally, Heal the Bay recommends that the City include penalties for noncompliance with this ordinance consistent with the penalties adopted by the cities of Malibu and San Francisco. It is critical that the proposed ordinance include enforceable penalties to truly influence retailer and consumer behavior.

The urgency for local government to take action has never been greater. The legacy of our growing addiction to single-use plastic packaging will be felt in the environment for centuries to come. Banning plastic bags in the City of Manhattan Beach will help enhance the City's recreational and tourism economy, improve the quality of life for residents, free valuable landfill space and restore our environment to a cleaner and healthier state. We urge you make the City of Manhattan Beach an international leader on this issue and adopt a ban on single-use plastic and biodegradable plastic bags.

Sincerely,

Sarah Abramson
Coastal Resources Director
Heal the Bay

Sonia Diaz
Legislative Associate
Heal the Bay

⁵ U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Public and Constituent Affairs. (1999) "Turning to the Sea: America's Ocean Future." United Nations Environment Programme (1995) "Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities." Note by the secretariat. UNEP (OCA)/LBA/IG.

⁶ California Integrated Waste Management Board. (June 2007) "Performance Evaluation of Environmentally Degradable Plastic Packaging and Disposable Food Service Ware: Final Report." pp. 38-39.

⁷ Australian Department of the Environment and Heritage Plastic Shopping Bags – Analysis of Levies and Environmental Impacts Final Report, prepared by Nolan-ITU, December 2002, Page 33.