

**Re: Support and Comments for S.B. No. 349, An Act Concerning Single-Use Carryout Plastic and Paper Bags and the use of Reusable Bags.**

March 10, 2015

Dear Committee Members:

Surfrider Foundation is an environmental non-profit organization that is dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's oceans, waves and beaches through education, research, conservation and activism. Surfrider engages in many campaigns and programs, including our Rise Above Plastics Program, which aims to keep plastic pollution out of the ocean.

We submit this testimony today in support of SB 349, An Act Concerning Single-Use Carryout Plastic and Paper Bags and the use of Reusable Bags, on behalf of the Surfrider Foundation Connecticut Chapter and its thousands of members, volunteers and supporters.

The amount of marine debris is staggering. A recent study published by the international journal *Science* estimates that 8 million metric tons (or 17 billion pounds) of plastic marine debris alone enters the oceans annually from 192 countries with coastal access.<sup>1</sup> Marine debris injures, kills and contaminates sea life. Fish, marine mammals, sea birds and sea turtles all ingest debris, mistaking it for food, and hundreds of thousands of animals become entangled in marine debris each year. For some threatened or endangered species like sea turtles, marine debris is a significant cause of death. Marine debris also litters our beaches and coastal waters and can damage coral reefs, reducing their appeal to tourists, and requiring continual, costly cleanup. Floating debris can be a navigational hazard and necessitate time consuming and expensive boat repairs.

In order to address the plastic marine debris problem in Connecticut, Surfrider Foundation encourages you to vote favorably on SB 349.

Worldwide, nearly two million single-use plastic bags are distributed each minute.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that Americans go through about 100 billion plastic bags a year, or 360 bags per year for every man, woman and child in the country.<sup>3</sup> In 2009, about 3.8 million tons of waste plastic

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<sup>1</sup> Jenna R. Jambeck, Roland Geyer, Chris Wilcox, Theodore R. Siegler, Miriam Perryman, Anthony Andrady, Ramani Narayan, and Kara Lavender Law, "Plastic Waste Inputs from Land Into Water." *Science* 13 Feb. 2015: 768-771.

<sup>2</sup> Plastic Bags Fact Sheet, Earth Policy Institute. 26 Oct. 2014, available at: [http://www.earth-policy.org/press\\_room/C68/plastic\\_bags\\_fact\\_sheet](http://www.earth-policy.org/press_room/C68/plastic_bags_fact_sheet)

<sup>3</sup> C. Anela Choy & Jeffery C. Drazen, Plastic for Dinner? Observations of Frequent Debris Ingestion by Pelagic Predatory Fishes from the Central North Pacific, 485 *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 155 (2013), at 161

"bags, sacks and wraps" were generated in the United States, but only 9.4% of this total was recycled.<sup>4</sup> Numerous studies have documented the prevalence of single-use carryout bags littering the environment, blocking storm drains, and endangering wildlife.

Plastic bags are problematic in the litter stream because they float easily in the air and water, traveling long distances and never fully breaking down in water. Plastic bags have consistently been reported in the top five most common forms of ocean litter. For every square mile of ocean, there are about 46,000 pieces of plastic floating in it, which never biodegrades and can take up to 1,000 years to photodegrade.<sup>5</sup> An estimated 100,000 marine mammals and up to 1 million sea birds die every year after ingesting or being tangled in plastic marine litter, including plastic bags.<sup>6</sup> Marine life, including whales, turtles, and large birds often swallow plastic bags in the ocean either inadvertently or because they resemble their food source, which can clog the animals' throats and cause choking; fill their stomachs, which prevents food consumption and leads to starvation; and infect or poison them with harmful toxins.<sup>7</sup> Recent studies also indicate that plastics absorb toxins at extremely high rates, which when ingested by animals, leads to bioaccumulation of those toxins resulting in significant health issues, disease and/or death.<sup>8</sup>

Cleanup of plastic bags is costly. Connecticut's taxpayers bear costs associated with the effects of single-use carryout bags on the solid waste stream, drainage, litter, and wildlife.

However, numerous studies and participating municipalities report that prohibiting the free distribution of single-use carryout bags will dramatically reduce the use of those types of bags, alleviating the associated pollution problem and reducing cleanup costs. For example, where Washington D.C. imposed a 5-cent fee on all disposable shopping bags, the city reportedly saw a reduction from 270 million bags to 55 million bags within the first year and 50% fewer bags were found in an annual local river cleanup;<sup>9</sup> and in San Jose, California, which prohibits single use shopping bags, except for recycled paper bags at a 10-cent fee, the city experienced a downward trend in the presence of single-use plastic bags in the street (by 59%), storm drain (by 89%), and creek litter (by 60%), and an upward trend in the use of reusable bags by shoppers (from 4% to 62%).<sup>10</sup>

Surfrider Foundation strongly suggests that SB 349 address and ban single-use plastic shopping bags, and only allow the provision of recycled paper bags, for a mandatory, uniform fee. A mandatory uniform fee is necessary to (1) disincentivize the use of single use paper bags, and incentivize customers to bring their own reusable bags, and (2) even the playing field for all retailers, including small businesses, who without a uniform fee requirement, may be more likely to have to charge higher fees than larger retailers who may potentially be better

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<sup>4</sup> N. Mrosovsky, Leatherback Turtles: The Menace of Plastic, 58 *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 287 (2009)

<sup>5</sup> New Bans on Plastic Bags May Help Protect Marine Life, Worldwatch Institute, available at: <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/5565>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations. *Marine Litter: Trash that Kills*, November 2001, available at: [http://www.unep.org/regionalseas/marinelitter/publications/docs/trash\\_that\\_kills.pdf](http://www.unep.org/regionalseas/marinelitter/publications/docs/trash_that_kills.pdf), pp. 10

<sup>7</sup> Greenpeace, "Plastic Debris in the World's Oceans." 14 (2006), at 7, available at: [http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/planet-2/report/2007/8/plastic\\_ocean\\_report.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/planet-2/report/2007/8/plastic_ocean_report.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*, at 20.

<sup>9</sup> Craig, Tim. "D.C. Bag Tax Collects \$150,000 in January for River Cleanup." *Washington Post* 30 Mar. 2010; Riley, Charles. "No Paper, No Plastic. The Tax That Works Too Well." *CNN Money*. N.p., 5 Oct. 2010. Web. 27 Feb. 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Romanow, Kerrie, Dir. Enviro. Services, City of San Jose, "Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance Implementation Results and Actions to Reduce EPS Foam Foodware." 20 Nov. 2012, available at: [http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203\\_d5.pdf](http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203_d5.pdf)

positioned to absorb some of the associated costs and charge lower fees. In any event, a portion of said fee should be retained by the retailer to cover associated costs of providing the bag(s), and a reasonable portion of the fee should go towards creating an educational program to educate consumers about the benefits of utilizing reusable shopping bags and reducing waste. This model incentivizes the use of reusable shopping bags, disincentivizes use of single use bags, covers costs to provide bags, and reduces waste. Thus, it is fair and beneficial to business owners, consumers, and the public at large while supporting a healthy environment.

On behalf of the Surfrider Foundation Connecticut Chapter, we appreciate your attention to the very serious threats that plastic pollution poses to Connecticut's coastal resources and water quality.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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