



October 7, 2016

The Honorable John Laird, Chair and Councilmembers
 California Ocean Protection Council
 1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
 Sacramento, CA 95814
Sent Via email to: COPCpublic@resources.ca.gov

RE: Item 5 - Support for California Ocean Protection Council Endorsement of Proposition 67

Dear Secretary Laird and Ocean Protection Council Members:

On behalf of our 18 organizations and the hundreds of thousands of members we represent, please accept the following comments in support of the California Ocean Protection Council (the Council) endorsing California’s Proposition 67. As you know, Proposition 67 is the referendum to uphold California’s plastic bag ban law. A “Yes” vote on Proposition 67 keeps the bag ban in place. Our organizations have been engaged for years in the effort to reduce the amount of plastic litter in the environment throughout California. We are very supportive of California’s single-use plastic bag law passed in 2014, which would help eliminate one of the largest sources of litter found at our regular beach and river cleanups. We strongly urge the Council to endorse Proposition 67 in order to protect California’s precious and valuable waterways. As the state agency charged with protecting California’s marine resources, this is a key opportunity for the Council to demonstrate its leadership as a national leader in ocean protection.

When Governor Brown signed SB 270 into law in 2014, California became the first state in the nation to enact a comprehensive single-use bag law. Unfortunately, out-of-state members of the plastic bag industry spent over \$3 million on a signature-gathering campaign that ended up putting the ban on hold until November 2016, when voters have to decide upon its fate at the ballot (Proposition 67). Over 150 municipalities across California have adopted local bans on plastic bags, and many of these measures are also designed to curb distribution of paper bags, including Los Angeles County, the City of Los Angeles, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica, Pasadena, and Sacramento.

Californians use an estimated 13 billion single-use plastic bags every year.¹ Despite both voluntary and statewide efforts to implement recycling programs, the statewide recycling rate for plastic bags remains

¹ “The Problem With Plastic Bags” Californians Against Waste <http://www.cawrecycles.org/the-problem-of-plastic-bags>

around five percent;² the majority of single-use plastic bags – even if reused once or twice by consumers – end up in our landfills or as part of the litter stream, polluting our inland and coastal communities and wasting taxpayer dollars on cleanup costs.

Plastic bags are designed to be used for minutes, but persist in the environment without biodegrading. They are also one of the largest contributors to trash found in local waterways. In fact, a characterization study of urban litter in storm drains and the Los Angeles River estimated that plastic bag litter makes up as much as 25% of the litter stream.³ Once plastic debris, including plastic bags, reaches aquatic environments, it can choke and starve wildlife, distribute nonnative and potentially harmful aquatic life, absorb toxic chemicals, and degrade to micro-plastics that may subsequently make their way into the food web.⁴ A 2012 study by the Convention on Biological Diversity found that 663 marine species have been impacted by marine plastic litter through entanglement and ingestion.⁵ Given the scope and nature of this problem, any lasting solution must be widespread geographically.

The cleanup of litter from single-use bags puts an additional strain on our economy. California spends approximately \$25 million annually to landfill plastic bag waste.⁶ In addition, a 2012 report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found California's coastal cities and counties spend about \$420 million each year to combat litter and curtail marine debris.⁶ These cleanup costs do not reflect the energy costs associated with producing single-use bags, or the negative socioeconomic and environmental costs associated with single-use bag litter. Ultimately, the costs to clean up plastic bag waste are borne by taxpayers, and during a time of tight budgets, there are many vital public services to which that money could go instead.

Plastic bags can also clog catch basin inserts and screens thereby increasing local flood risks. Littered streets and beaches also threaten California's ocean economy, valued at \$43 billion. An estimated 408,000 jobs, mostly in the tourism and recreation sectors, are tied to the ocean economy.⁷

Many of the single-use bag ordinances enacted by local governments have changed consumer behavior, resulting in an increased use of reusable bags. For example, Los Angeles County announced that its ordinance which bans plastic carryout bags and charges for paper carryout bags, and which became fully effective in 2012, has resulted in a 94% reduction in overall single-use bag usage (both plastic and paper).⁸ Furthermore, single-use bag ordinances are effective in reducing plastic pollution. Since January 2012, the City of San Jose has prohibited distribution of all single-use bags except for recycled content paper bags, which consumers must purchase for 10 cents. The City's 2012 litter surveys indicate that

² County of Los Angeles. Dept. of Public Works. *Los Angeles County Plastic Bag Study: Staff Report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors*. Aug. 2007: 2. Print.

³ County of Los Angeles. Dept. of Public Works. *Los Angeles County Plastic Bag Study: Staff Report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors*. Aug. 2007: 24. Print.

⁴ Barnes D. K. A., Galgani F., Thompson R. C., Barlaz M. "Accumulation and fragmentation of plastic debris in global environments." *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* 364 (2009): 1985–1998. Print.

⁵ <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-67-en.pdf> ⁶ "Shopping? Take Reusable Bags!" CalRecycle. 23 Nov. 2011. Web. <<http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/publiced/holidays/ReusableBags.htm>>.

⁶ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Region 9. Sept. 2012. Web. <<http://www.epa.gov/region9/marinedebris/pdf/WestCoastCommsCost-MngMarineDebris.pdf>>.

⁷ Kidlow, J. et al. (July 2005). "California's Ocean Economy," report to the California Resources Agency, prepared by the National Ocean Economics Program.

⁸ "About the Bag." Los Angeles County. Web. <http://dpw.lacounty.gov/epd/aboutthebag/>.

plastic bag litter has been reduced “approximately 89 percent in the storm drain system . . . when compared to [preordinance] data . . .”⁹

Supporting California’s bag ban will be a major step in reducing the economic waste and environmental impacts that single-use bags create. Municipalities and the general public throughout the state look to agencies such as the California Ocean Protection Council for leadership on this issue. In a state with such a great wealth of coastal resources, we hope that we can ensure this type of protection for the greater good of the local environment and tourism economy that is dependent on a clean and healthy coast. We urge you to endorse Proposition 67 as sister agencies such as the California Coastal Commission and the California Fish and Game Commission have done.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical environmental issue.

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Heal the Bay

Angela Howe
Surfrider Foundation

Zachary Plopper
WILDCOAST

Kim Delfino
Defenders of Wildlife

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Green Sangha

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The Center for Oceanic
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⁹ Kerrie Romanow, City of San Jose, memorandum to Transportation & Environment Com. re: *Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance Implementation Results and Actions to Reduce EPS Foam Food Ware*, 20 Nov. 2012. Web. <http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203_d5.pdf>.