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Beach Environmental Awareness Campaign Hawai'i

P.O. Box 25284 · Honolulu · Hawai'i · 96825

(808) 393 2168

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DATE: 5th February 2009, 4:15pm

TO: Honorable Mike Gabbard, Chair
Committee on Energy and Environment

FROM: Suzanne Frazer & Dean Otsuki, co-chairs, Beach Environmental Awareness Campaign Hawai'i

SUBJECT: TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB 584, RELATING TO SOLID WASTE

We strongly support this bill banning plastic shopping bags in stores across the state. This is an important first step towards addressing the growing problem of plastic accumulation in the ocean, waterways and on land. The risk of not addressing this problem is devastation of marine life. Plastic now outnumbers plankton 46 to 1 (latest research from Algalita Marine Research Foundation). All sizes of marine organisms are ingesting plastic from the bottom of the food chain (plankton) to the top. This also means that plastic is being ingested by humans who eat seafood.

The dangers of plastic bags are that although they do break down into smaller and smaller pieces, they do not bio-degrade. Plastic in the marine environment absorbs persistent organic pollutants (POP's) such as PCB's, DDT, and other toxic pollutants up to a million times as in the ambient sea water. When plastic is ingested by marine life these same toxins as well as contaminants from the original plastic material leach into the fatty tissues of marine animals. The toxins bioaccumulate up the food chain. These chemicals cause disruption of the endocrine system of marine life as well as humans. Studies have shown that in species of fish, males are changing form into females. In human studies of populations that eat a mainly seafood diet, there has been a dramatic decrease in the birth of male babies.

Plastic bags are harmful to marine life whether they are knotted, photodegraded or intact. Plastic bags are extremely dangerous to young sea turtles as all species of sea turtle hatchlings eat jellyfish. A floating plastic bag is easily mistaken by sea turtles for a jellyfish. Ingesting plastic bags causes the turtle to suffocate and die. Adult sea turtles such as the



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Leatherback, Loggerhead and Olive Ridley also eat jellyfish, with this being the main source of food for the endangered Leatherback sea turtle. All other sea turtle species are listed as threatened. We must take steps to prevent further devastation of these species. Banning plastic shopping bags is a necessary step towards protecting sea turtles.


This bill is a win-win for everyone. The retailers benefit from not having to buy plastic bags and from an improved environmental image (which is tarnished when bags with their logo/ name on them are continually found in waterways). Consumers benefit from becoming more conscious of reusing and reducing. Plastic bags also rip easily and are a nuisance – accumulating in large numbers before being thrown away. Reusable bags are strong, don't break, and can be machine washed.

In February 2008, Kale's Natural Foods was the first grocery store on Oahu to go plastic bag free. We surveyed customers at Kale's Natural Foods in May 2008 to find out if customers were positive or negative about Kale's not providing plastic shopping bags. Of the more than 200 people surveyed 94% responded very positively and as a consequence the use of reusable bags increased.

Using reusable shopping bags instead of plastic bags is an easy step the community can make towards helping the environment.

Please accept this as written testimony in support of SB 584, pertaining to solid waste.

Sincerely,


Suzanne Frazer


Dean Otsuki

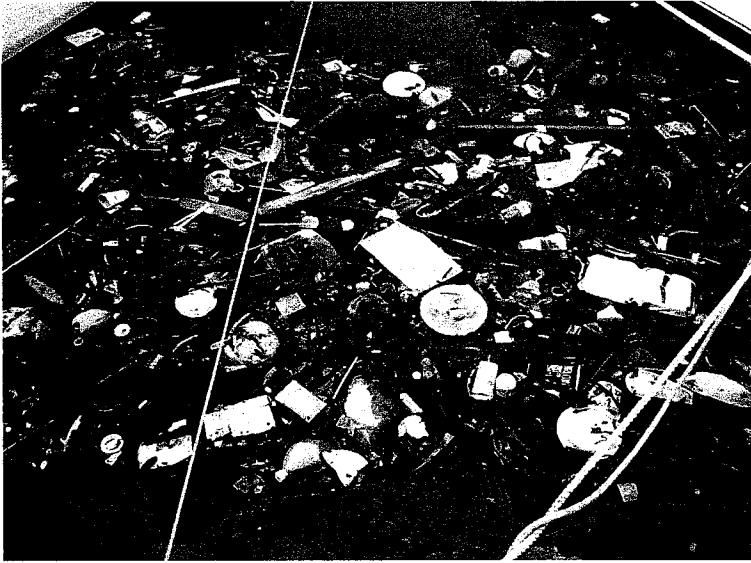


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PLASTIC BAGS LITTERING HAWAII'S BEACHES AND WATERWAYS

Photos by Beach Environmental Awareness Campaign Hawai'i



Ala Wai Small Boat Harbor, August 2008.



Ala Wai Small Boat Harbor, August 2008.



Ala Wai Small Boat Harbor, Aug. 08.



Kahuku Beach, December 2008.



Kahuku Beach, February 2008.



Shriners, March 2008.



Waimanalo Beach Park, Mar. 2008.



Sherwoods Beach, March 2008.



Ka Iwi coastline, August 2007.



Sherwoods Beach, August 2007.



Makai Pier, October 2007.



Ka Iwi, August 2007.



Makai Pier, Oct. 2007.



Ka Iwi, August 2007.



Portlock, July 2007.



Bellows Beach Park, July 2006.



Green sea turtle eating plastic bag, photo: Ron Prendergast