

FOR A “PLASTIC FREE SHOALHAVEN”

Mayor Findley, Councillors and gallery visitors. Thank you for inviting me to address this chamber today.

My name is Judith Deane and I have been fortunate to have lived in Paradise for over thirty years and this is why I am so passionate about what I am here to present today. I am a member of Shoalhaven Transition, a worldwide, grassroots movement transitioning communities to meet the challenges of the future by becoming resilient, sustainable and cohesive communities that support the health of themselves and their environments.

There is a global movement away from “single use plastic” in particular, “single use plastic bags” as communities and governments are comprehending the impact of this once applauded, cheap and convenient invention.

There are bills before State Parliament asking for the banning of the single use plastic Bags so NSW can join SA, TAS, NT, the ACT and more recently QLD in arresting the problem of the single use plastic bags. We don't have to wait for legislation. Our communities can lead the way.

At a local level, Huskisson and Kangaroo Valley were amongst the first regional areas to adopt a Plastic Bag Free initiative back in 2003. Last July the Shoalhaven Council adopted the A Plastic Free July Initiative and a number of Boomerang Bag workshops were held and as a result a number of villages have adopted regular Sew Sustainable Working groups.

At a national level, numerous Australian Organisations are approaching the problem. Tangaroa Blue with their Australian Marine Debris Initiative, Plastic Pollution Solutions with their education in schools and their communities, Boomerang Bags with their replacing plastic bags with material bags, reducing material otherwise bound for landfill, the Responsible Cafes Movement reducing waste in cafes, Take 3 for the Sea and CleanUp Australia cleaning up the land and our beaches to name a few. Globally, there are many more.

In order for you to make an informed decision I would like to read an excerpt from an article I wrote in the last edition of The New Bush Telegraph.

From the Bakelite beginnings in the fifties to the technological trappings of the 2000's, plastics now permeate every aspect of our lives and devastatingly pollute our environments and threaten our very existence.

They are in every nook and cranny of our homes, phones, containers, cosmetics, clothes, cars, our toys, in every consumed convenience you can imagine, even in cigarette butts. They now constitute ninety percent of our consumables. They are both an eyesore and an unseen. Their toxic soup of chemicals both within and those created in their manufacture, leach into our soils, our waterways, we ingest them, inhale them and absorb them.

Plastics don't breakdown they break up into miniscule particles that can last over a thousand years and reduce to sludge like powder near impossible to clean up. They take up residence in all our environments. They lie on the land, fly with the wind, nest in our trees, they fester in landfills and leach into our soils only to be absorbed into plants and be mistaken for food by wildlife. They get carried through waterways and on reaching the sea are carried by currents into sea dump sites called ocean gyres. It's estimated some 8 million tons of plastic pose a serious threat being said to be ingested by 31 species of marine mammals and more than

100 species of sea birds and at this current rate experts predict there will be more plastic than fish in our oceans by 2050. Every living thing is exposed, flora and fauna, our earth and us.

Studies suggest that between them, that up to 60% of this waste comes from our closest Asian neighbours. Countries experiencing rapid economic growth, endeavouring to reduce poverty and improve their quality of life, who do not yet have the budgets and waste-management infrastructures to tackle their excess waste. Projections suggest that plastic consumption in Asia will rise to some 80% and exceed 200 million tons by 2025. Asian waste washes up on scarcely populated northern Australian shores brought in by the currents, where it is difficult to access and costs us millions of tax dollars to clean up. These studies conclude, interventions in these countries alone could reduce global plastic-waste leakage by approximately 45% over the next 10 years.

Plastics impact on human life is becoming evident as the most harmful chemicals known in plastics are essentially endocrine disruptors. These endocrine disruptors mimic the hormone oestrogen and disrupt hormonal balance. They are thought to affect fertility, development and sexuality in both men and women. By interfering with testosterone in utero, they disrupt normal sexual development, causing early puberty in girls, diminishing sperm counts in males and feminizing men. They are also thought to be responsible for the rise in breast and uterine cancer in women and prostate cancer in men. There has been an observed correlation between the rise in cancers in general, severe mood swings, hyperactivity and autism in children, obesity in general and the propensity to type two diabetes. Whilst not considered the only cause, its significance cannot be ignored.

In the manufacturing process different combinations of resins and polymers create plastics with different properties, and different types of plastic present different health hazards. Numerous toxic chemicals are released, many known to be carcinogenic and neurotoxic. These include vinyl chloride, from PVC; dioxins and benzene, from polystyrene; and formaldehyde, from polycarbonates. Many of these are known as persistent organic pollutants or POPs, are highly toxic and unlikely to go away.

The application of heat, repeated washing, changes in acidity and alkalinity cause plastics to leach a number of chemicals into the environment from the manufacturing process right through to the consumption and maintenance of plastic products. Climate change challenges of increasing temperatures and acidity both on land and sea, rising incidences of excessive winds, bushfires and storm surges, could exacerbate the situation on numerous levels, too many to mention.

The worst offender, widely used in food and beverage packaging is bisphenol A, or BPA. An American centre for disease study found it in 95% of urine samples it tested. It has been measured in our blood, amniotic fluid and breast milk. Further studies concluded that BPA leaches into water at room temperature, and when exposed to boiling water, leaches 55 times more rapidly. This begs the question as to why it is used in so many of the products we consume. That café cup of coffee and convenient take away might need to be considered a health hazard.

Polycarbonate water bottles are a major source of human BPA exposure and yet the self-interested, multinational corporations producing them are contemptuously increasing their production. Other powerful allied industries and corporations are prepared to spend billions of dollars to misinform consumers, debase expert analysis, lobby governments, to repeal bans and litigate to dissuade and dismantle any legislation likely to affect 'business as usual'. For an embarrassing number of companies, its cash before consumers, profits before protection, share-holders before shame. However, there is a growing number of

predominately small businesses developing a conscience and embracing change and we need to praise and support them.

Another class are those called phthalates, predominant endocrine inhibitors contained in PVCs. Used to soften plastic they can be found in toys, hygiene products like deodorants and shampoos, cosmetics, shower curtains, plastic tablecloths, raincoats, pliable food packaging and a many other products. Being loosely bound to plastic, they are easily absorbed into food, beverages and saliva, and commonly detected in our bodies.

Another health problem referred to as outgassing is where chemically volatile organic compounds (VOC's) in the form of gases are evaporated into the air then inhaled or absorbed into other things including our bodies. They can be detected by odour, that nice new car smell or the assault on the senses of walking into a two dollar shop. VOCs are prevalent in households and can cause what is referred to as "sick building syndrome" and cause occupants to report symptoms such as dizziness, nausea, allergies, skin/eye/nose/throat irritations and asthma. Long term exposure can include cancer and heart disease. These VOCs include aldehydes, alcohols, plasticizers, and alkanes. PVC is probably the worst outgassing offender of them. Heat can exacerbate outgassing occurrences and poor ventilation concentrate them in containing it.

The most common plastic is **polyethylene terephthalate or PET** commercially used in most beverage (drink) and condiment containers. . Polystyrene commonly seen in convenience packaging in supermarkets and take away shops is a problem plastic because it's very difficult to recycle. Coffee and convenience clash again. There are numerous plastics we use, too many to mention here but I will refer you to the article for further reading.

Often you'll find a number embedded in these products to distinguish their chemical components and in order for them to be separated for recycling purposes (only 9% of our plastics are recycled) or more often, down-cycled and made into other plastic products, but ultimately they still end up in landfill and pollute our very existence forever.

Plastic bags are an issue on their own aside from the health and polluting hazards already mentioned they are non-biodegradable, regardless of the "greening language" they do not fully decompose. They increase our foreign dependence on oil, using 12 million barrels of it per 100 billion bags to manufacture and let's not mention our precious water. They are more difficult to recycle as they can damage expensive equipment. Less than 3% of them are recycled.

Another stand-alone issue is that of microbeads, measuring less than 5 millimetres they are added to facial scrubs, toothpastes and other personal care products and one product can contain some 350,000 of them. Un biodegradable by products of our obsession with cleanliness and beauty, an estimated 5 trillion of them are flushed down our drains, their minute size allowing them to bypass wastewater treatment filters, they enter our waterways, are eaten by unsuspecting marine life and seabirds, their toxins enter our food-chain and are near impossible to clean up.

The common sense solution to avoid the toxicity of plastics is to avoid plastics, easier said than done you say, but not impossible. The world is waking up.

Local communities can make a difference, take Coles Bay, Tasmania who in the first year of banning disposable bags in 2003, claimed there were 350,000 fewer bags in the area. The state followed their lead and nationally it spread to bans in SA, NT and the ACT. England has cut its plastic bag use by 85% since applying a surcharge, has used 6 billion fewer bags

and managed to donate the funds raised and give the equivalent of 38 million dollars to charity.

Countries that have completely banned plastic bags are Rwanda, China, Taiwan and Macedonia and more recently India no business can now use or sell plastic carrier bags, plastic plates, plastic cups, plastic spoons, cling film, polystyrene and microbeads, plastics of any sort. Now there's a challenge for rich first world countries.

Australians use over 10 million new plastic bags each year and it costs the Australian government more than \$4 million a year to clean up them up. Annually, enough plastic is thrown away to circle the Earth four times. Plastic litter dumped in Western Australia can travel to the east coast of South Africa. Up to one trillion bags are consumed worldwide each year. That's about 1 million plastic bags every minute. It takes around 500 to 1,000 years for plastic to fully degrade. Only 3% of plastic bags used in Australia are recycled. 70% of marine debris actually sinks to the bottom of the ocean. There is enough crude oil in 8.7 plastic bags to drive a car for 1 kilometre. The average Australian uses 3 plastic bags a day for an average of less than 12 minutes. It is projected that by 2050 by weight that there will be more plastic in our oceans than fish.

The Shoalhaven attracts tourists wanting to experience our 165kms of longest coast of any region, a unique coast where some 46,000 people reside and these numbers swell to five times more on their arrival. The council manages some 40 beaches, 220 beach access ways and 50 boat ramps. Within the Shoalhaven we have several national parks and marine parks to protect 147 threatened species. It manages 1200 parklands and reserves and services some 198,220 public litter bins.

With its pristine beaches, waterways and extensive coastline, rolling green hills and national parks, The Shoalhaven is the jewel in the south coast crown. Its proximity to Sydney has it being the most visited regional destination in the state. Tourists both nationally and abroad are in awe of what we have here and tourism is unmistakably a huge asset. We are truly privileged to live here and we have a responsibility to protect our environment and our assets.

We can become conscience consumers. We can begin a conversation about conservation and share it with our friends. We can endeavour to read labels and familiarize ourselves with identifying symbols and recycle them correctly. We can look for "BPA free" labels on food and beverage containers and avoid plastic wrap. We can choose alternatives to plastics and be mindful of what we purchase and bring into our home. We can give up bottled water as it is clearly not pure, refill our own bottles and push our community for water stations. We can take your own bags to the supermarket, own reusable mug to our favourite responsible café. Say no to plastic straws and lids, celebrate without balloons and plastic party favours and we can remember to Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Refuse. As consumers we can drive constructive change.

Shoalhaven Transition will soon host PLASTIC POLLUTION SOLUTIONS a social enterprise that travels Australia and whose specialty is awareness and education, focusing on the impacts of plastic pollution on the environment. They help communities transition away from single-use, disposable plastic via initiatives and projects that have proven to be successful in Australia and overseas. Their background is in entertainment and public speaking and they use this platform to effectively engage, inspire, empower and enable communities, usually in partnership with shire councils. The founder, Anthony Hill, is an ambassador for The Australian Marine Debris Initiative, Boomerang Bags, Surfrider Foundation Australia, and Bottle For Bottle.

With the full support of Shoalhaven City Council, and in collaboration with Shoalhaven Transition, they will be holding a campaign in the Bay & Basin area in the final two weeks of term 1. The aim is to transition the Shoalhaven to a Plastic Conscience shire leading to a reduction of all single-use disposable plastic with far reaching economic and environmental outcomes. They hope to engage the support of other groups and organisations to ensure that this campaign is a success. Anthony is impressed with the pristine Shoalhaven area and its community and grateful of councils support thus far and wants to return later in the year.

Shoalhaven City Council since embarking on A Plastic Free July 2016 has supported the Boomerang Bags Communities Initiatives and now has groups in Manyana, Ulladulla, Bay and Basin, Berry and Culburra.

Shoalhaven Transition further proposes that

- SCC continue to support the Boomerang Bags Communities
- SCC continue to support PPS campaign throughout the region.
- the Take3FORTHESSEA be extended throughout the region.
- SCC follow a number of other councils in developing signage for supermarkets and large general stores asking “Did you bring your reuseable bag with you?”
- SCC support the “Responsible café movement” in bringing their waste reduction initiatives to our regions cafes.

The aim of all these initiatives is to transition the Shoalhaven to a Plastic Conscience shire leading to a reduction of all single-use disposable plastic.

Mayor Findley and esteemed Councillors, I ask you to support the motion before state parliament calling for a ban on single use plastic bags and furthermore, support for continuing educational and supportive initiatives in reducing single use plastics in the Shoalhaven.