



STATE'S MARINE DEBRIS REPORT SETS LOFTY GOALS

Heal the Bay already driving implementation of OPC recommendations

Santa Monica, CA (Friday, July 25, 2008) -- California environmental group Heal the Bay today affirmed a series of preventive actions it is taking to reduce the scourge of marine debris in anticipation of a report scheduled for release next week by the state Ocean Protection Council.

Heal the Bay has consulted extensively with authors of the report, a draft of which lays out ambitious goals for eliminating plastic bags, polystyrene food packaging, cigarette butts and other items from local waters. The growing amount of trash in our oceans is choking marine ecosystems, local economies and quality of life along California shores.

Under the umbrella of the Pacific Protection Initiative, Heal the Bay has worked successfully over the past two years with a number of municipal leaders and state legislators to enact legislation that significantly curbs the amount of manmade debris entering our taxed seas.

"We expect this report to be a significant boost to the environmental community's ongoing fight to rid our seas of unsightly and harmful trash," said Dr. Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay. "Our organization will continue to use our resources to help turn this plan into a reality that all Californians can be proud of."

Mirroring OPC recommendations, this week Heal the Bay conferred with Los Angeles city council members who unanimously endorsed a policy to eliminate plastic bags at local retailers by 2010 if a statewide fee on their use is not imposed. It also consulted with the cities of Santa Monica, Malibu and Manhattan Beach on similar policies.

On a statewide level, Heal the Bay is sponsoring AB 2058, which sets a 25-cent fee on the use of any single-use plastic shopping bag if waste diversion targets are not met. The group's legislative team continues to lobby various state and municipal bodies, with the ultimate goal of eliminating California's 19-billion-bags-a-year addiction.

The OPC report also urges plastic manufacturers and users to be more diligent about keeping materials out of waterways. Manufacturers of nurdles – the preproduction pellets that are the building blocks of most plastic products – are now required by law to eliminate harmful discharge of these materials, under a state law passed last year with Heal the Bay's sponsorship.

This year, the group is sponsoring SB 899, a bill designed to identify areas that are plagued by derelict fishing gear. Abandoned equipment can ensnare and kill marine mammals, as well as pose safety hazards to ocean users.



Among the other recommendations in the OPC report:

- Implementation of a producer responsibility program for items commonly found as marine debris, for example a required take- back program similar to car battery manufacturers.
- Increasing the enforcement of anti-litter laws. The report recommends an escalating fine for multiple littering violations, starting at \$2000.
- Establishing a litter fee assessed on the sale of products commonly littered in California.
- Conducting a study to determine which plastic additives are most threatening to the marine environment, educating the public about these additives, and preparing a plan for their possible prohibition.

While the draft report sets aggressive abatement goals, it unfortunately provides few implementation strategies to achieve them. Based on the recommendations, Heal the Bay has set out a legislative action plan, as well as community outreach programs to drive implementation.

For more of Mark Gold's perspective on water issues, visit his blog: <http://spoutingoff.wordpress.com/>

About Heal the Bay

Heal the Bay is a nonprofit environmental organization dedicated to making Southern California coastal waters and watersheds, including Santa Monica Bay, safe, healthy and clean for people and aquatic life. This year it will host Coastal Cleanup Day in Los Angeles County, mobilizing more than 12,000 volunteers to remove debris at 60 locations on Sept. 20.

About the OPC

Established under a 2004 state law, the Ocean Protection Council coordinates activities of ocean-related state agencies to improve the effectiveness of state efforts to protect ocean resources within existing fiscal limitations.

For background on the report please visit <http://www.resources.ca.gov/copc/>

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