



• MAGNETIC ISLAND  
NATURE CARE  
ASSOCIATION INC.

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7 April 2012

Mayoral Candidate for Townsville

Dear [Mayoral candidate]

### **Re: A Single-Use Plastic Bag Free Townsville**

For some years, Magnetic Island Nature Care Association (MINCA) has been working to create a plastic bag free Magnetic Island. While this campaign has received very positive support from the community, from visitors to the Island and from some retailers and some members of the current Council (notably Vern Veitch), we believe that to be fully successful, the direct involvement of Townsville City Council is essential, and that the target should be widened to include the whole of Townsville.

MINCA, in alliance with a number of other local groups, as detailed below, is now seeking a commitment from you, if elected, to phase out the use of single-use plastic bags in Townsville by June 2013.

Our dependence on single use plastic bags creates a significant environmental menace and a cost to communities through:

- visual pollution of litter, and damage to our tourism industry<sup>1</sup>
- excessive consumption of oil and water in manufacture<sup>2</sup>
- cost to councils from litter clean up<sup>3</sup>
- exposure to marine animals, and subsequently humans, to toxic pollutants such as polychlorinated biphenyls<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Extrapolating from national data, it is estimated that around 500,000 plastic bags ended up as litter in Townsville last year alone. A large number of these bags find their way into our marine environment. ([http://www.marrickville.nsw.gov.au/services/waste/plastic\\_bag\\_reduction/plastic\\_bag\\_facts.html?s=584692691](http://www.marrickville.nsw.gov.au/services/waste/plastic_bag_reduction/plastic_bag_facts.html?s=584692691))

<sup>2</sup> It has been estimated that the energy consumed for each plastic bag for its life cycle is equivalent to about 13.8 mL of crude oil. Extrapolating from national data, Townsville uses around 25 million bags per year, equivalent to 350 kL of crude oil that could be saved. (Decision Regulatory Impact Statement: Investigation of options to reduce the impacts of plastic bags April 2008, Environment Protection and Heritage Council [www.ephc.gov.au](http://www.ephc.gov.au))

<sup>3</sup> Extrapolating from national data, we estimate that litter clean up in Townsville costs \$1.3 million per annum (<http://www.banthebag.com.au/#2>)

<sup>4</sup> PCBs are absorbed by marine animals, and bioaccumulate in the food chain. PCBs are known to cause endocrine disruption in many species, including humans. (Decision Regulatory Impact Statement: Investigation of options to reduce the impacts of plastic bags April 2008, Environment Protection and Heritage Council [www.ephc.gov.au](http://www.ephc.gov.au))

- damage to vessels by wrapping around props and clogging water intakes<sup>5</sup>
- the creation, when water-filled, of perfect breeding grounds for malaria-bearing mosquitoes.<sup>6</sup>

Arguably, the most significant is the damage that plastic bags can do to our marine animals, many of which are already threatened and suffering due to the loss of significant areas of seagrass.

Tens of thousands of whales, birds, seals, dolphins, sharks and turtles are killed every year from plastic bag litter in the marine environment as they often mistake plastic bags for food such as jellyfish. Plastic bags, once ingested, cannot be digested or passed by an animal so they stay in the gut. Plastic in an animal's gut can prevent food digestion and can lead to a very slow and painful death. As plastic bags can take up to hundreds of years to break down, once an animal dies after ingesting plastic and decays, the plastic is freed back into the marine environment to carry on killing other wildlife.

Townsville residents will remember Whitey the crocodile who, in 2008, died soon after his capture off Magnetic Island. He was found to have 25 plastic bags in his gut, preventing him from digesting his food; effectively he died of starvation.

Similarly, in 2000, a Bryde's whale died on a Cairns beach, with an autopsy finding the whale's stomach tightly packed with 6m<sup>2</sup> of plastic.

Plastic has been found in the intestinal tract of 40% of the turtles autopsied at the Moreton Bay Research Station.

Earlier this year, Fremantle City Council expressed its intention of legislating a local government ban on plastic bags. Plastic bags are already banned in South Australia and the Northern Territory and in dozens of countries, towns and cities worldwide, including, China, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Rwanda, Eritrea and Botswana, Austin (Texas), Seattle, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Dhaka (Bangladesh), Beijing, Sigatoka (Fiji) and Mumbai.<sup>7</sup>

We are calling on you, as a mayoral candidate, to commit to the end of single-use plastic bags throughout Townsville by June 2103.

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<sup>5</sup> In 2002, the Boating Industry Association of New South Wales and the Boating Industry Association of Queensland reported that plastic bags caused millions of dollars worth of damage to boat engines each year, when they become wrapped around propellers, or clog water intakes or engine cooling systems, 'cooking' the engine (Decision Regulatory Impact Statement: Investigation of options to reduce the impacts of plastic bags April 2008, Environment Protection and Heritage Council [www.ephc.gov.au](http://www.ephc.gov.au))

<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Report\\_urges\\_Kenya\\_to\\_ban\\_plastic\\_bags](http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Report_urges_Kenya_to_ban_plastic_bags)

<sup>7</sup> An excellent summary of actions to reduce circulation of single-use plastic bags around the world by Clean-Up Australia is at [http://www.cleanup.org.au/PDF/au/cua\\_plastic\\_bag\\_usage\\_around\\_world\\_april\\_2010.pdf](http://www.cleanup.org.au/PDF/au/cua_plastic_bag_usage_around_world_april_2010.pdf)

We would appreciate hearing from you by 16 April.

Yours sincerely,



Wendy Tubman  
President, MINCA

in alliance with:



*This letter is written in Century Gothic, the font that researchers at the University of Wisconsin found uses 30% less ink than standard Arial – but still, please only print if essential.*