OCEANA Protecting the World's Oceans

222 NW Davis Street, Suite 402
Portland, OR 97209 USA

February 14, 2023

Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR, 97301

RE: SUPPORT for SB 543, SB 544, and SB 545

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and Committee Members:

Oceana strongly supports Senate Bills 543, 544, and 545 aimed at tackling plastic pollution at the source by requiring reductions in the use of single-use plastic packaging and foodware and allowing for reusable and refillable containers in Oregon. Oceana is an international nonprofit dedicated solely to protecting and restoring the world's oceans. Oceans cover 71 percent of the globe and provide over 50 percent of the Earth's oxygen. Our oceans are home to most of the life on our planet and play a central role in the world's natural systems, like regulating our climate and absorbing carbon dioxide. Despite the ocean's importance to life on Earth, they are choking on plastics. Our environment is being inundated with a material that persists for generations, builds up in our environment, and threatens marine animals, as well as humans.

Over 900 marine species, including many endangered species, are affected by marine plastic pollution primarily through entanglement and ingestion. Even zooplankton, tiny marine organisms that form the base of the ocean food chain, are eating plastic, which can then be transferred to larger ocean predators like fish.

Today, nearly 40% of the plastic produced annually is for single-use plastics and packaging, a sector that expanded rapidly due to a global shift from reusable to single-use containers. And unsurprisingly that is what we are seeing on our beaches too. Almost all of the top 10 most common items found in worldwide coastal cleanups in 2021 were single-use plastic products, including food wrappers, beverage bottles, grocery bags, takeout containers, straws, and stirrers.

Most of the plastic in the ocean consists of pieces too small to be picked up in a beach cleanup. This microplastic contamination of the oceans is hard to count, but one study estimated that up to 51 trillion microplastic particles were present on the ocean surface in 2014. We now know microplastics are found to permeate all ocean depths. When plastics enter the ocean, they break up into smaller and smaller pieces, which act as magnets for harmful pollutants.

Oregon is not immune to these impacts. Plastics have been found in Pacific oysters and rockfish off our coast. And plastic pollution is not exclusively a coastal problem. In 2021, Environment

Oregon did a survey of 30 waterways and found microfibers and/or microplastic particles in every single waterway they sampled-- from the Willamette, Rogue and Deschutes Rivers to Wallowa Lake and Crater Lake and everywhere in between.

Half of all plastic in Earth's history was produced in the last 19 years. We are now seeing plastic in our air, water, food and bodies — and most of it did not exist before 2004. As of 2015, the world is producing more than 400 million tons of plastic every year. And plastic production is not slowing down. In fact, it is growing faster than ever. The plastics industry expects annual production will more than triple by 2050. Almost all plastics are made from fossil fuels that contribute to climate change from extraction to production to their end of life. If plastic were a country, it would be the fifth-largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. In the U.S., plastic is projected to outpace coal's greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. We simply cannot meet our climate goals if we continue using plastics in this way.

Plastic production, use and disposal disproportionately affects low-income communities and communities of color by polluting the air, water, and soil where production and disposal facilities are located and through increased exposure to plastics. A 2021 report by the United Nations Environment Programme and Azul describes how the life cycle of plastics -- from the extraction of fossil fuels to the disposal and pollution of plastic waste -- disproportionately affects vulnerable communities.

Oregon took an important step toward improving our recycling system under the Recycling Modernization Act. But even a robust recycling system cannot keep pace with the ballooning production of plastics, particularly single-use plastic packaging and foodware which are often difficult and costly to recycle. Reduction must be part of the solution. That's why Oceana and many other organizations support the three proposals in front of you today. Together, these bills will help Oregon curb single-use plastics by eliminating the most egregious plastics like polystyrene foam, requiring producers to reduce the amount of single-use plastic foodware and packaging they sell or distribute in the state, and paving the way for consumers to bring reusable containers to grocery stores and restaurants.

For these reasons, we encourage you to vote yes on SB 543, SB 544, and SB 545.

Sincerely,

Tara Brock
Pacific Counsel
Oceana